

The Forum Gazette

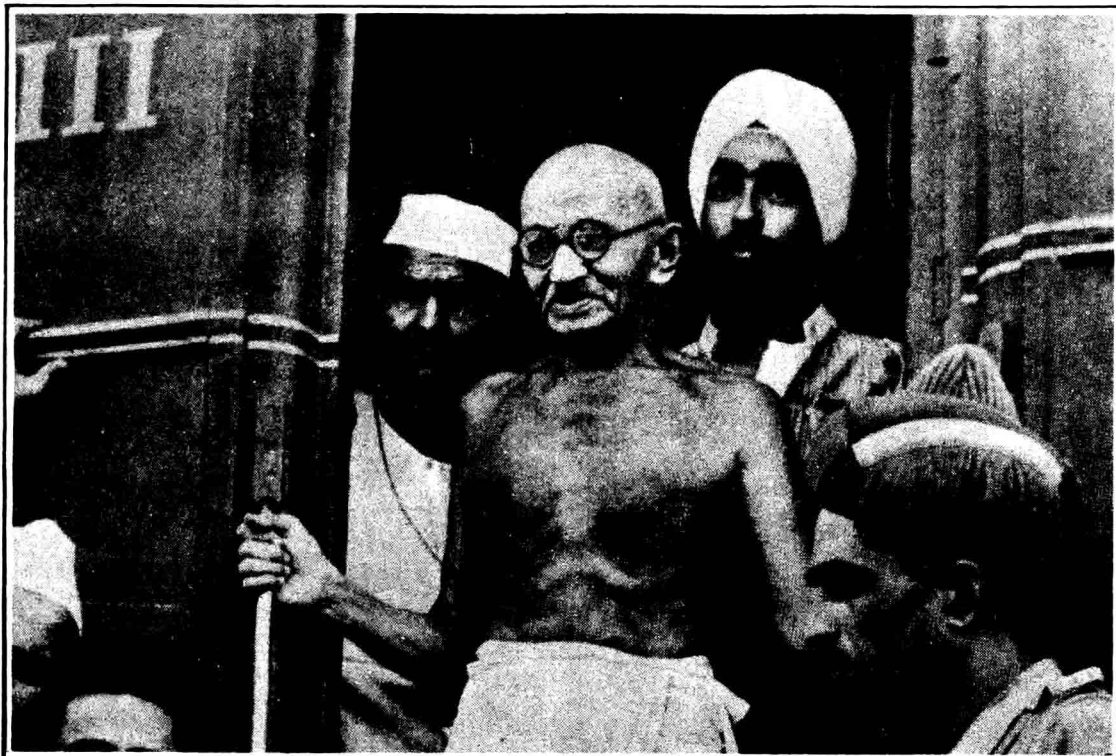
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Fortnightly

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Mahatma Gandhi Volunteer Extra Ordinary



Gandhi stepping down from the train at Lahore station on his way to the North-East Frontier, May, 1938.

Dangers Ahead for Voluntary Action

Bid to Suppress Dissent and Development Alternatives

Baljit Malik

As the nation goes through the motions of observing another *Gandhi Jayanti*, a storm of indignation is gathering in the voluntary movement. There is strong evidence to suggest that a well orchestrated move is afoot to spread the wings of political and bureaucratic control over the functioning of voluntary agencies engaged in rural development and service-oriented

activities. If the attempt succeeds it will result in rendering ineffective a host of alternative approaches in the implementation of development programmes. It will also result in silencing those voices which still raised in defence of the poor, and are often heard and seen to be protesting against the infringement of law by the State and its agencies.

Mahatma Gandhi interviewed on Politics, Constructive Work and The State

NIRMAL KUMAR BOSE interviewed Mahatma Gandhi in Wardha on November 9 and 10, 1934. Matters social and political are covered in the conversation.

The interview is of particular relevance, given the direction the country has taken for its 'development' and the brutalisation of the Indian State.

The interview also touches on Sarvodaya, Socialism and Marxism at it also does on Gandhi's controversial

views on *Varnasramdharama*.

Of particular importance is Gandhi's view that social, constructive and humanitarian work inevitably has political implications. This is something which could be usefully taken notice of by those elements in the Government of India and their sympathisers in the voluntary movement, who are keen to 'depoliticise' the voluntary sector in the national development effort.

The notes in the interview are Gandhi's own.

Answer I

The two issues of Khadi and political organisation should be kept absolutely separate. There must be no confusion. The aim of Khadi is humanitarian; but so far as India is concerned, its effect is bound to be immensely political.

The Salvation Army wants to teach people about God. But they come with bread. For the

Continued on page 5, col 4

Question 1
While working in a village we have found that the chief obstacle to any real improvement in the condition of the villagers are two in number.

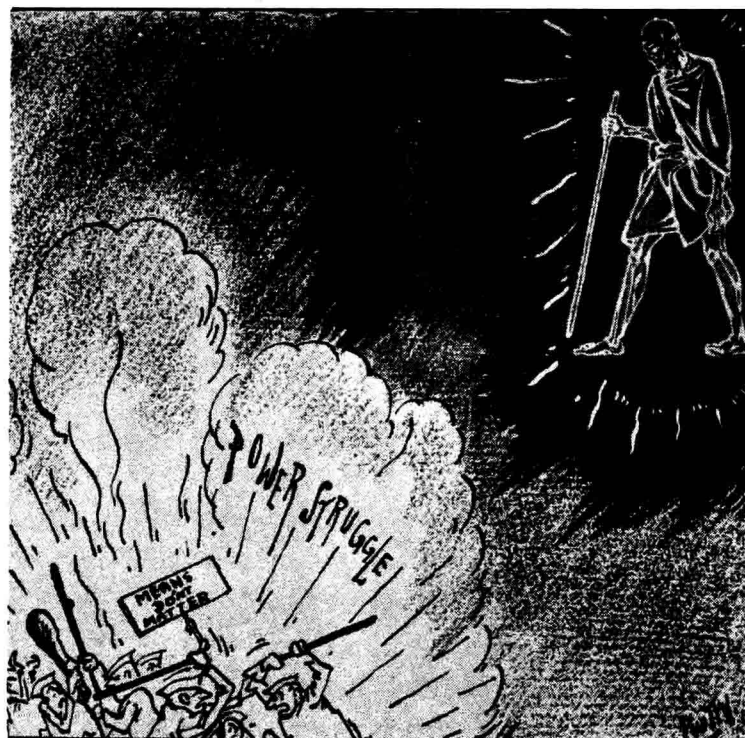
(1) They have forgotten the art of co-operation or of combination in order to resist any encroachment upon their rights.

(2) They live practically enslaved by those who merely own land while doing no work, and control the money resources of the village. This slavery, which is due partly to outside conditions and partly to their own character, and our complete neglect of their education, have left the masses absolutely devoid

of any will of their own.

What should be our principal object in Khadi-work or other forms of village reconstruction? Khadi-work in some parts of Bengal has degenerated into a mere method of giving a little relief to the villagers, while it has failed to restore the will which alone can bring about any lasting transformation in their condition.

Our question is, should Khadi be merely that sort of humanitarian work or should we use it chiefly as an instrument of political education? Our experience has been that unless the ultimate objective is kept clearly in mind, it degenerates easily into a work of no significance.



All this in his name!

ment with hard evidence or the harm being caused by the direction of official policy in virtually every sector of national development.

Addressing a national convention on collaboration among non-governmental organisations held in New Delhi from 26-28 September, Shri R.N. Krishnaswamy who heads the voluntary action cell of the Gandhi Peace Foundation said that "eternal vigilance was the price of liberty."

He warned the convention against the creation of a new feudal class in the rural areas. The government, he said, wanted to pump increasing sums of money and resources into rural development.

This he felt would result in further empowering this new class to exploit the poor even more. Shri Krishnaswamy urged voluntary organisations to remain alert in defending the rights of the vast marginalised majority of Indians and ensuring that development policies and programmes did not go against the grain of their interests.

3-Day Convention of Voluntary Agencies

The 3 day convention was called largely in response to an official move through the Planning Commission, the Ministry of Rural Development, and government-controlled 'autonomous' organisations like PADI and CART — now merged into CAPART — to establish a statutory Council of Rural Voluntary Agencies and laying down a Code of Conduct and

Continued on page 3, col 1

WHO'S AFRAID OF NASTY NAM

A Look at Harare and the Press

Preminder Singh

South Africa was clearly l.b.w. at the six day international Non Aligned Meet (NAM) held in Harare from 1st to 6th September. Umpires M. Thatcher and R. Reagan, however, refused to sanction the appeal and, even though this just wasn't cricket, there was nothing the 101 nations (hereinafter referred to as natives) could do about it.

Among the 50 heads of State present, all the men the developed white world (sahibs) hates most were there. Commander Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua, Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, Fidel Castro of Cuba and Yasser Arafat of the PLO. And while the western press worried about the choice of Nicaragua as the venue of the next conference or fumed at the antics of Gaddafi, the Indian press concentrated on one topic: the superlative performance of India and its Prime Minister.

"Rajiv steals the show", said GH Jansen (DECCAN HERALD Sept. 10) "The Prime Minister had the very cosmopolitan press corps absolutely eating out of his hand; one beaming American correspondent said to me, 'he's outstanding that guy' ... 'he gave even his toughest answer in a gentle voice and with a smile.'"

Well Bowled Rajiv

F.J. Khargamvala in four long articles (HINDU Aug. 28 and 30 Sept. 13 and 16) sprinkled his praise with a heavy dose of cricketing analogies and mixed metaphors. He found that "during Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's innings India kept a firm hand on the capstan in a turbulent environment." "Meanwhile on centre-stage Mr. Rajiv Gandhi was seen patrolling the covers while Mr. Mugabe kept wicket." and in the middle of all this "the Movement (was) doffing the cap to ... diplomatic midfielder N. Krishnan." The last straw, if I



may say so came with Rajiv Gandhi finishing his sandwich lunch with the President of Iran, bluffing the official spokesman to announce that they had been discussing South Africa, to which "a pinch of salt had to be added between the lines". Now this is too much. Was the pinch of salt added to the statement, the President or the spokesman.

Who's the Fairest of Them All

Most embarrassing in his adulation was editor M.J. Akbar of the TELEGRAPH (Sept. 1 to 6). He listened like an adoring son to Rajiv's "carefully worded speech that was a marriage of hours of drafting with skilful English", he looked on approvingly as "Mr. Gandhi made a point of shaking hands and saying a brief hullo to Col. Muammar Gaddafi." He was angry that "Gen. Zia did not come to hear Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's speech" but happy that "President Zia was not given a seat at table number 11, the head table presided over by the PM ... Kenneth Kaunda sat to the left of our Prime Minister and Robert Mugabe to the right..." Even King Birendra of Nepal was on the same table and so was lowly Cyprus but "Pakistan was put in it's place".

Mr. Akbar paints a touching picture of "The Prime Minister using his Mont Blanc pen (whose writing is unmistakable) to draw a dash and an exclamation mark ..." and describes how Mr. Gandhi talks to his guests inside the dining hall, how "Mr. Gandhi has become such a popular figure..." But he forgets to tell us what Mr. Gandhi ate or drank, how was his digestion? Did he get some sleep?

Not everyone was pleased with what was going on. Vigilante (STATESMAN Sept. 7) gives only two cheers to Doordarshan for giving us "Harare, Harare, Harare and 'Rajiv Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi...' We saw every leader whom the PM met, every lunch, dinner and banquet he hosted. If Doordarshan is to go to International meets ... they had better stop feeding Indian viewers only Indian stuff; we get enough of that at home, thank you."

The Frozen Past

The only Indian journalist to come up with an original idea

was Editor Kuldip Nayar (TRIBUNE Sept. 4) "Some organisations" he said "outlive their importance. The non-aligned movement is one of them. 'Created in the fifties when the world was divided into two power blocs with no meaningful contact between them it was needed.'"

"However the situation has changed in the seventies... The non-aligned movement has not been able to get out of the syndrome of the fifties. It has put itself in a deep freeze and cannot see that there is a thaw all around... Bereft of new ideas they still stick to the same old approach and cliches. It is time they got out of their feeling of self-importance, set their own house in order and change the policies and attitudes which are so endemic to them."

Aligned and Spineless

If anyone could give them a jolt it was the New York Times. "The non-aligned movement is too divided to pick its next meeting place, too aligned to condemn Soviet occupation of a member state, too spineless even to expel a nation whose leader all but spat at the members — what happened at the movement's aimless conference in Zimbabwe recalls a famous remark by Marx — Groucho, that is — that he would never join a club so porous as to admit him. By trying to represent too much, the 99 nation club stands for nothing at all."

"Opposing apartheid can hardly sustain the movement's pretensions but the members cannot agree on any other cause... By one count the resolutions voted in Zimbabwe condemned the United States 54 times, the other fellow never once by name" ... The N.Y. Times hopes that the movement is rethinking its reflexive, self injuring hostility to America.

However even after condemning the other fellow, the United States must still be condemned for its aggression against smaller countries, continued denial of justice to the Palestinians and the unethical support to the South African Government.

Sanest Reporting

The sanest reporting from Harare was from Victoria Britain of the GUARDIAN (Sept 1 to

3) "In the crisp highland air ... dazzling with scarlet, purple and pink flowering trees the 13 point economic sanction plan against South Africa will bring a bitter economic war — a war to the death ... of white South Africa... This Harare summit is a watershed in the confrontation between South Africa and the rest of the world community" in which "Rajiv Gandhi's attitude has been the key in tipping the scale towards the South African War."

You Bastards!

Plenty of insults were traded all around. The U.S. State Department attacked Mr. Mugabe's speech as a "litany of arbitrary and unfounded charges ... highly offensive and counter productive (GUARDIAN Sept. 4).

Col. Gaddafi launched his attack on Reagan the "petty actor", Egypt, Ivory Coast, Zaire as "US spies" the Commonwealth as "British puppets" and the NAM as a funny movement ... and ... an international falsehood."

Egyptian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Butros Butros Ghali was not impressed. He described the Colonel's speech as "nothing more than a comedy staged by a mentally disturbed head of State who lives in a state of political backwardness and adolescence (REUTER, HERALD, TRIBUNE 5th Sept.).

What now! V.M. Badola (DECCAN HERALD Sept. 6) thinks enough is enough. "Rajiv takes on the world's woes, what about India's?" he says. In probably the longest sentence of the conference he said "Its time he came home relieved of the NAM burden to take a closer look at these problems and decide once and for all whether it would be worth his while to spend all his energies on solving international problems or settle down to tackling more pressing or urgent problems at home which grow more serious and ominous as each day passes".

Young M.K. Gandhi bar-at-law discovered racism in South Africa and spent a lifetime fighting untouchability in India. Our Gandhi seems to have discovered his role as Sir Galahad (desi version) fighting apartheid and leading the forces of black Africa into the 21st Century

Baba Sheikh Farid and the Sikh Tradition

Baba Sheikh Farid-ud-din Masaud Ganji-Shakar (1173-1265) popularly known as Baba Farid, was born in 1173 in a small village, Koth-iwal, near Multan now in Pakistan, of a family distinguished for learning and piety. From childhood he was given to prayer and observance of religious discipline. In his search for the Divine Light he underwent hard penance at various places under the influence of the two great Sufi Saints-Khawaja Muin-ud-din Chishti Ajmeri (also known as Khwaja Gharib Nawaz) and Khwaja Qutb-ud-din Bakhtiar Kaki who was a disciple of Khwaja Muin-ud-din Chishti. It is said that when once Khwaja Muin-ud-din Chishti happened to see Baba Farid Delhi when he was just a youngman of about twenty he remarked "Farid is a lamp that will illuminate the silsilah."

After preaching at several centres like Delhi, Hansi and Multan he finally settled down at Ajodhan (Pak Pattan) now in Sahiwal district of Pakistan, where Muslims and Hindus in large numbers began to flock to his Khanqah in search of peace and spiritual bliss.

Evanesence of human life

Farid, time was when these frail thighs scoured over desert and hill;

Now, feeble with age, even the prayer-jug looks as though lying miles away.

Farid, where are thy parents from whom began thy life?

They have set out on their last journey;

Yet thou still goeth about thoughtless, unawakened.

Exhortation to Moral Life

Lord, give it not to me to supplicate favours at another's door

Should such be Thy will, take then life from this body.

Farid, my black wear leads the world to assume I am a saint; Sinner that I am, who knows better the hollowness of my pious appearance?

Farid, return good for evil; let not wrath touch thy heart; Thus wilt thou escape affliction, and thy life be fulfilled.

Farid, those who strike thee, strike them not back; Keeping patient ever, be tender even to thy aggressors.

Farid, there lies Death, looming like the opposite bank of the river;

Across is hell, full of loud and earpiercing shrieks;

Some there are who see it all; others go about wrapped in crass ignorance;

Know that deeds done in this life will bear witness against us in the next.



The
Forum
Gazette

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Threats to Voluntary Activism

Continued from page 1, col 5

Ethics — (See Spotlight on Page 16).

The backdrop to the convention was provided by the generally arbitrary and highly published government action to deny foreign donor funds to 27 voluntary organisations in various parts of the country. Included in this list of 27, which is expected to mushroom further, were various educational and social service institutions run by minority communities. The authorities also went so far as to include civil liberties organisations in the list, when unlike the government itself, these organisations have functioned on shoe-string budgets without a trace of so-called tainted foreign money.

Jaya Jaidy adds "even such voluntary activities as providing relief to victims of communal attack has now been categorised as political activity. In the future created when the Home Ministry issued its circular naming the 27 organisations, some matters went by unnoticed. Notifications were sent to certain organisations putting under the clause which says that organisations of political nature are not to accept foreign contributions except with the prior permission of the central government. One such organisation which received this notification was the Peoples' Relief Committee.

When the Peoples' Relief Com-

mittee came into being on November 5th, 1984, the former Vice President, Justice Hidayatullah was its chairman. The committee comprising of eminent journalists such as Kuldip Nayyar and M.J. Akbar, religious heads such as the Bishop of Delhi certainly also had eminent political leaders from various parties such as the Janata, Telugu Desam and National Conference because their credibility and influence would assist in the difficult task of providing relief and rehabilitation to the victims of the carnage and looting that took place in Delhi.

The Peoples' Relief Committee was one of the few organisations among many that came into being during those days that subjected its accounts to a certified audit, published its report with a detailed list of donors, and showed how and where it had spent the money it collected.

Despite its totally apolitical work the Home Ministry in its wisdom, deemed it "political".

The government should realise the citizens, political and otherwise, do get together to provide relief in a humane endeavour, scrupulously avoiding any attempt at political gains or exploitation of the poor. Or are government officials too cynical to believe that such things can happen?"

Political Control for Political Reasons

The case of the Peoples' Relief Committee only goes to show that there are genuine reasons to suspect the motivation behind the government's Midas touch with which it wants to patronise and thus also coopt and control the voice of the voluntary sector. Moreover there is the danger that a statutory council under government domination would use the stick of branding an organisation 'political' for political reasons unrelated to national security.

Foreign Funded 'Government' Document

There is a somewhat ironic side to the attempted 'coup' to coopt and regulate the voluntary sector. This is provided by a "draft for discussion" which was circulated by the Consultant on Voluntary Agencies to the Planning Commission. This document carried no identification as to who had commissioned or published it. However, according to information available with the Gazette, the document was prepared from within the corridors of Yojana and Krishi Bhawans and financed by a foreign donor agency based in Delhi. The message was not lost on those who work in the voluntary sector: All goes well and all is fair, if only you are close to the ruling establishment.

Delhi Declaration of Voluntary Organisations

This Convention of representatives of four hundred non-governmental organisations functioning in several states and union territories reaffirms the value of voluntarism as an expression of the nation's spirit of freedom and democratic functioning enshrined in our Constitution as a fundamental right. It realises the imperative need for closer collaboration among voluntary organisations in the country to strengthen their fellowship, deepen their understanding of the problems facing the people, and of the threats and dangers to voluntarism in the country. It recognises the necessity for widening the voluntary sector to better serve the people — especially the poor and the down-trodden.

The Convention is firmly of the opinion that the free and unfettered association of citizens through voluntary organisations is essential for safeguarding their rights and achieving their legitimate objectives. It, therefore, views with alarm the systematic attempts being made by the Government to control the voluntary agencies and to direct their programmes and activities. There is a strong feeling that the Government has been following a policy of dividing the voluntary organisations on the basis of their ideology or religious affiliations. The attack on the Gandhian organisations

through the Kudal Commission is being followed by a series of actions against activist, individuals and organisations of all kinds, whose only concern has been the cause of the poor and the down-trodden. The proposed Bill for the formation of a Statutory Council of Voluntary Organisations and to lay down Code of Conduct-Ethics for voluntary organisations is another attempt to muzzle the free voice of voluntarism. The Convention, therefore, feels that the time has come for voluntary organisations to be alert and vigilant, and resist all attempts to coopt them and thus reduce their strength and effectiveness.

This Convention appeals to all voluntary organisations and movements to strengthen their work at the grass-roots level so that the groundswell of public opinion will deter the forces that undermine the spirit of voluntarism.

The voluntary sector is a vital nourishment for the democratic life of our nation and we believe that the people of this country will consider no sacrifice too great to safeguard and strengthen volunteerism.

Delhi

September 28, 1986

(Adopted by representatives of nearly 400 voluntary organisations attending the 'National Convention for Collaboration among Voluntary Organisations' held in Delhi, September 26-28, 1986).

National Convention Deplores Harassment of Voluntary Agencies

Call for More Coordination Between Groups

On September 28, the first National Convention for Collaboration among Voluntary Organisations concluded by adopting a Delhi Declaration On Voluntarism reaffirming the value and spirit of voluntarism work in the country. The convention also expressed deep alarm at the increasing efforts by the state to control and regulate free independent expression and dissent in the country.

For the past three days, three hundred and fifty organisations came together to analyse the growth of controls by the government over their work including in particular the recent moves for a statutory Code of Conduct for Voluntary Organisations. Representatives from all over the country outlined the serious trend of restricting, regulating the activities of organisations working with the poor and marginalised communities in the country. Many instances were narrated where organisations working within the constitutional framework have faced intelligence inquiries, harassment, intimidation of their activists for no good reason. In spite of the plethora of charges levelled against them, there has not been a single reported case when these charges have been proven in Court. More recently these organisations are being charged with being anti-national with an intention to create an image in the public mind that voluntarism as a whole is suspect. The Convention deplored these trends.

The Convention also attempted a major introspection of these activities as it was felt that there were serious flaws and weaknesses within the voluntary sector. Among the questions discussed was that there was unfortunate competitiveness and credit-seeking by some, a widespread lack of clarity on what relationship to have with the government and government programmes as also whether some larger groups were restricting the functioning of smaller groups.

The central focus of the convention was to explore mechanisms of cooperation. It was asserted that there was need to expand the network to include a larger number of voluntary organisations and also to work together with the many other concerned individuals and democratic movements towards a broader voluntary movement in the country.

Participants agreed that there was need for greater collaboration at local and at national levels both around issues discussed and around development activities. It was also decided to organise an efficient exchange of information and plan local and national level actions.

The convention had delegates from far-flung areas of the country, ranging from grass-root level workers to coordination of national level programmes. They represented both small and large groups working primarily for the marginalised sections of society, mostly beyond reach of State-sponsored development schemes.



They Also Work... And How!



Photo: Dharam Vir Jayner

NEWSHOUND

By Rap



Gandhi Jayanti - 1986

The Man Who Walked from Porbandar to Rajghat



THE THREE MONKEYS

My Mission

My mission is to convert every Indian, whether he is a Hindu, Muslim, or any other, even Englishmen and finally the world, to non-violence for regulating mutual relations whether political, economic, social or religious. (*Economics of Khadi*, p. 587).

Millions are too poor to buy enough Khadi to replace the discarded cloth.... Let them be satisfied with a mere loin-cloth.

... Let there be no prudery about dress. India has never insisted on full covering of the body for the males as a test of culture.

...In order ... to set the example, I propose to discard ... my *topi* and vast, and to con-

tent myself with only a loin-cloth and a *chaddar* whenever found necessary for the protection of the body (*Ibid*, p. 50, *Young India*, 29 September 1921).

"A man cannot then practise Ahimsa and be a coward at the same time. The practice of Ahimsa calls forth the greatest courage. It is the most soldierly of a soldier's virtues He is the true soldier who knows how to die and stand his ground in the midst of a hail of bullets."

"A small body of determined spirit fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history."

— Gandhi

"Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth..."

— ALBERT EINSTEIN



On Martyrdom, Terrorism and Retaliation

... I cannot therefore mourn over his death. He and his are to be envied. For though Shrad-dhanandji is dead, he is yet living. He is living in a truer sense than when he moved in our midst in his giant body....

Let us not ascribe the crime of an individual to a whole community. Let us not harbour the spirit of retaliation.

I wish to plead for Abdul Rashid.... It does not matter to me what prompted the deed. The fault is ours. The newspaperman has become a walking plague. He spreads the contagion of lies and calumnies. He exhausts the foul vocabulary of

his dialect and injects his virus into the unsuspecting and often receptive minds of his readers. Secret and insidious propaganda has done its dark and horrible work, unchecked and unabashed. It is therefore we, the educated and the semi-educated class, that are responsible for the hot fever which possessed Abdul Rashid.

If you hold dear the memory of Swami Shradddhanandji, you would help in purging the atmosphere of mutual hatred and calumny. You would help in boycotting papers which foment hatred and spread misrepresentation. I am sure that India would lose nothing if 90

per cent of the papers were to cease today.... Now you will perhaps understand why I have called Abdul Rashid a brother and I repeat it. I do not even regard him as guilty of Swami-ji's murder. Guilty indeed are all those who excited feelings of hatred against one another. For us Hindus the Gita enjoins on us the lesson of equi-mindedness; we are to cherish the same feelings towards a learned Brahman as towards a *chandala*, a dog, a cow or an elephant.

This is no occasion for mourning or tears, it is an occasion that should burn on our hearts the lesson of bravery....

Talking of Gandhiji

From Talking of Gandhiji: Francis Watson and Maurice Brown-programmes broadcast on the BBC., Orient Longman's, 1957.

Narrator: ... The fateful day of August 15th 1947 was approaching ... in Calcutta itself serious rioting had broken out. Suhrawardy had been on the opposite side of the subcontinent, in Karachi, preparing for the creation of Pakistan, but he flew back to Calcutta and at once asked Gandhi to stay in the city.

Suhrawardy: ... I told him that I did not want him to go. He asked me whether I wanted him to remain in Calcutta and to use his influence to bring about peace between Hindus and Muslims. I told him that it was my most definite request to him, whereupon he said that he would be prepared to do so provided I joined him in his efforts, that he would stay in a locality in which the Muslims had been worse treated — that would be a dangerous locality for all Muslims — that he would go and sit in some hut or building from where he would work, but that he would only do so if I joined him. He warned me that my life was in danger, that the Hindus considered me to have been responsible for the riots and for what they had suffered, and consequently if I went on this mis-

sion it would be extremely dangerous for me....

Narrator: And so, in a Muslim house in one of the worst affected districts of the city, Suhrawardy established himself with Gandhi. Professor Nirmal Bose was again serving Gandhi, and he was there too.

Nirmal Bose: I remember Mr Suhrawardy and I used to sleep side by side on two beds on the floor and he used to tell me that "After all these years I have discovered this — that I still not trust any Hindu except Mahatma Gandhi — he at least is a man in whom I can place my trust wholly."

Suhrawardy: Gandhiji addressed a prayer meeting the first evening.... He asked me particularly not to attend his prayer meeting, but after the second day's prayer meeting he called upon me to address the Hindu crowd from the window of his room. He stood by me while I addressed the crowd.

Narrator: That was the Gandhi specific: a Hindu and a Muslim standing together and offering their lives to both communities in order the bring them to sanity. Gandhi's life was threatened. Suhrawardy's life was threatened. But in this huge city that for months had been racked with fear and violence the experiment succeeded....

Eric de Costa: We had gone through a year in which com-

munal differences in Calcutta had been terrible ... And then we kept on hearing these tremendous shouts (this was August 14) ... and driving up Central Avenue I saw truck after truck coming down loaded with men, sometimes women, and a great big shout — repeated over and again — '*Hindu Musulman ek ho. Hindu Musulman ek ho.*'

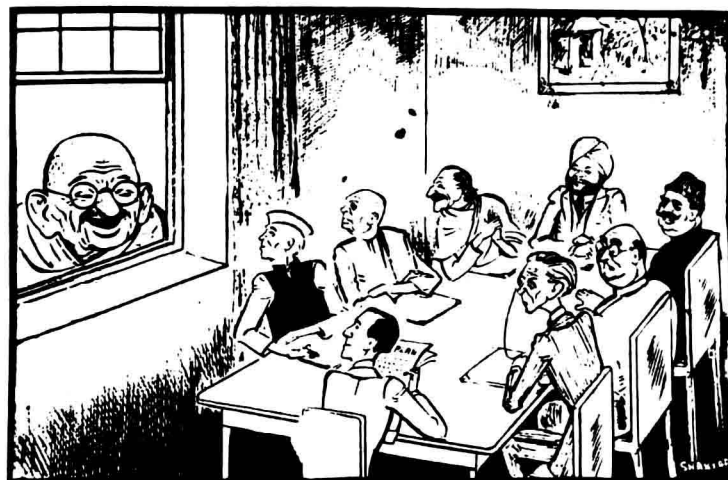
Sudhin Datta: And Eric took me out in his car and when we crossed Harrison Road and went into this area which had been virtually closed to us for a year, I saw soldiers, there were still soldiers with bayonets, but on those bayonets were little flags which people had fixed, and Hindus and Muslims were absolutely dancing; dancing — and lorries would come full of Muslims. Who'd stop, pull up a Hindu, and say — 'Come here, come here, we are going to celebrate. Up! Things like that. And when we saw this — I don't know about Eric, but I certainly could not restrain my eyes streaming over, because for a year it had seemed as if it was not worth while living in Calcutta. And then Gandhi had come — the first day I think they threw brickbats at him and sticks at him, and then of course he talked to them. Stood there, and slowly, in two or three days time, the atmosphere changed, and on the 14th what I saw is perhaps the only miracle I have in my life seen. •

Bapu as My Mother

Manubehn Gandhi

Bapu was father to innumerable men and women and the *guru* of many. There were many to whom he ministered as doctor or even as nurse. He was a dear friend to many colleagues. Countless people looked up to him as their redeemer. All this is aptly included in the term "Father of the Nation". For me, however, he was mother. Generally it is not possible for a man to become a mother to any one because he has not been endowed by God with a mother's loving heart. But Bapu appropriated for himself a share of even this divine

gift. So Bapu mothered me. He had, no doubt, brought up quite a number of girls but to me he often said, "Have I not become your mother? I have been father to many but only to you I am mother. A father does of course concern himself with the bringing up of his children but the real education of a girl comes from her mother. If a girl does not know some household work, the mother-in-law or the sister-in-law rebukes her saying, 'Your mother does not seem to have taught you anything'. No one finds fault with her father." •



HAVE YOU GOT IT?

The Ashram As a Catalyst of Change

From Pyarelal's Gandhi

The Ashram was the means Gandhiji used to introduce among the people the leaven of his basic spiritual disciplines, which provided the energy and drive during all his subsequent Satyagraha campaigns. Indeed, it may safely be said that without his Ashram organization none of those campaigns could have been organized or sustained. Wherever there was an Ashram, people learnt the secret Satyagraha; wherever there was a Satyagraha, there sprang up Ashrams in its wake. They set not only the pattern of the type of the worker that was needed for organizing non-violent mass movements in a country like ours but of the non-violent type of organization too.

Let me illustrate. A young man comes to see Gandhiji in his Ashram. He is a member of a secret, under-ground revolutionary organization. He looks furtively to the right and to the left, before and behind to see if he is watched, as he enters Gandhiji's room. He breathes fire against the British officials and asks in an undertone if there are any C.I.D. about. He tells Gandhiji that the youth are burning with indignation. Gandhiji points out to the visitor how his cult of violence has made a coward of him, by making him feel afraid of the C.I.D.

Gandhiji calls: "Chhotelal, Chhotelal!"

Chhotelal appears and is instantly recognized by the newcomer as a fellow ex-revolutionary, who had suffered in one of the earlier conspiracy cases. Gandhiji tells Chhotelal to explain to the newcomer how in the Ashram they deal with members of the C.I.D., who are detailed to watch them.

Chhotelal tells the young man how he (Chhotelal) had come to Gandhiji and abjured the cult of violence, having found in Gandhiji's non-violence a more effective weapon. "The person you saw me talking to outside is a member of the C.I.D. We have no secrets here; he knows it. We provide him daily with detailed information about the movements of various members of the Ashram and visitors. He performs odd jobs for us, has become like a member of our

family. Infact, we ask him to meet the arriving guests at the railway station and escort them here!"

The newcomer is very impressed. He tells Gandhiji, he wishes to become a member of his Ashram. Gandhiji tells him if he comes under his discipline, he will learn the art of making a real revolution.

To begin with, Gandhiji asks him to go to the untouchables, clean the latrines, sweep the floors and scrub the community kitchen utensils. As Gandhiji goes out a couple of hours later, he finds the newcomer — now an ex-revolutionary — chatting and shaking hands with the member of the C.I.D. at whose shadow he had trembled only a little while ago.

Turned Leaders Into Servants

In Bihar there were, the popular leaders — Rajendra Babu, a rising legal luminary, Acharya Kripalani, the ardent revolutionary, and others. They had tried and exhausted all constitutional methods. Terrorism they had renounced; among other reasons it had proved ineffectual. They were faced by a blank wall. The hiatus between the leadership of thought and leadership in action was complete. There was no common denominator of what they could plan and what the people could execute. The result was deep frustration. Gandhiji came to them as the evangel of action. He filled them with a new sense of hope. As the first thing, he made the leaders transform themselves into servants. He made the irrepressible Acharya forget his professorship and assigned to him the duty of a peon and a *darwan* (door-keeper), and when the Acharya could not quite master his pugilistic temperament, sent him to work in the kitchen as a cook! At his bidding, other leaders, the cream of the legal profession in Bihar, turned themselves into clerks — silent workers. He made them clean their own dishes and wash their clothes. These they had never done in their life. They were tasks fit only for menials. He thereby made them realize their identity with the toiling masses in however limi-

ted a manner and prepared their minds to think in terms of the mental capacity and daily experience of the common folk, which is the basic preparation for any mass movement. He sent forth the women of his Ashram, untrained and uneducated as these expressions are commonly understood — headed by his wife Kasturba Gandhi, who was almost unlettered — to minister to the men and women in Bihar's villages. He provided them with only three drugs — quinine, castor oil and sulphur ointment. Their other equipment consisted of the basic disciplines into which he in his Ashram had initiated them and which enabled them to move about freely and fearlessly in remote villages among utter strangers and to find interest and inspiration in ministering to them in the humble way without feeling jaded or fagged. They set up a school at Motihari and became school masters! "But what shall I teach them, I myself know next to nothing?" asked an elderly sister.

"You teach them history," suggested Gandhiji quietly.

"That would be fine," replied the lady. "But don't you see, I know nothing of history myself? How can I teach it to others?"

"But you have seen the world for fifty years," rejoined Gandhiji. "Who could be a fitter person than you to teach history? You tell them what you have seen of the world in your lifetime."

She became a teacher of history forthwith!

This was the basic education needed in the villages, not the history of England or of the various dynasties and Governors-General of India.

These simple-minded, unsophisticated workers gave to thousands the relief they needed but which nobody ever gave or thought of giving to them. They carried to them the message of literacy, industry, health, cleanliness and sanitation. They emancipated the women from *pardah* and instilled in them some of their faith and courage. Before long the whole countryside boiled over. There was hope and enthusiasm where there was only blank despair before.

N.K. Bose Interviews M.K. Gandhi

Continued from page 1, col 3

poor bread is their God. Similarly we should bring food to the people through Khadi. If we succeed in breaking the idleness of the people through Khadi, they will begin to listen to us. Whatever else the Government might do, it does leave some food for the villagers. Unless we can bring food to them, why should the people listen to us? When we have taught them what they can do through their own efforts, they will want to listen to us. We should leave out all political considerations whatever. But it is bound to produce important political consequences which nobody can prevent and nobody need deplore.

[Note:— The expression 'our aim should be purely humanitarian, that is economic' does not mean that the khadi-worker should merely aim at providing some relief within the present social and economic framework. He should really aim at building up a new productive system based on the people's own effort and under their own control. The organiser should try to reduce unemployment to the utmost extent rather than aim at doubling or trebling the quantity of Khadi produced for sale in distant markets.]

The advice that the worker 'should teach the people what they can do through their own efforts' implies that he should function in such a manner that, in the end, the people can be independent of his aid. In other words, his object should be to leave the common people self-acting in the end.

Question II

Could we not start small battles on local and specific issues against capitalism in the villages and use them as a means of strengthening the people or bringing about a sense of co-operation among them in preference to the Khadi method? When we have a choice between the two, which should we prefer? If we have to sacrifice all the work that we have built up in villages in connection with Khadi while fighting against the money-lender or the landed proprietor, for, say, a reduction in the rate of interest or increase in the share of agricultural produce, then what shall we do, provided the latter is more liable to evoke self-confidence among the villagers than the Khadi method of organisation?

Answer II

It is a big proviso you have added at the end of the question. I cannot say if fights on local and specific issues against capitalists are more likely to generate the kind of determination and courage needed in a non-violent campaign. But if I concede you that point, then Khadi would have to be sacrificed under the circumstances you quote. As a practical man, claiming to be an expert in non-violent methods, I should advise you not to go in for that type of work in order to train the masses in self-consciousness and attainment of power.

We are fighting for Swaraj in the non-violent way. If many workers in different parts of India engage in local battles of the sort you describe, then in times of necessity, the people all over India will not be able to make a common cause in a fight for Swaraj. Before civil disobedience can be practised on a vast scale, people must learn the art of civil or voluntary obedience. Our obedience to the Government is through fear; and the reaction against it is either violence itself or that species of it which is cowardice. But through Khadi we teach the people the art of civil obedience to an institution which they have built up for themselves. Only when they have learnt that art, can they successfully disobey something which they want to destroy in the non-violent way.

Question III

What then, Sir, is your ideal social order?

Answer III

I believe that every man is born in the world with certain natural tendencies. Every person is born with certain definite limitations which he cannot overcome. From a careful observation of those limitations the law of *varna* was deduced. It establishes certain spheres of action for certain people with certain tendencies. This avoided all unworthy competition. Whilst recognising limitations, the law of *varna* admitted of no distinction of high and low; on the one hand it guaranteed to each the fruits of his labours and on the other it prevented him from pressing upon his neighbour. This great law has been degraded and fallen into disrepute. But my conviction is that an ideal social order will only be evolved when the implications of this law are fully understood and given effect to.

Q. Do you not think that in ancient India there was much difference in economic status and social privileges between the four *varna*?

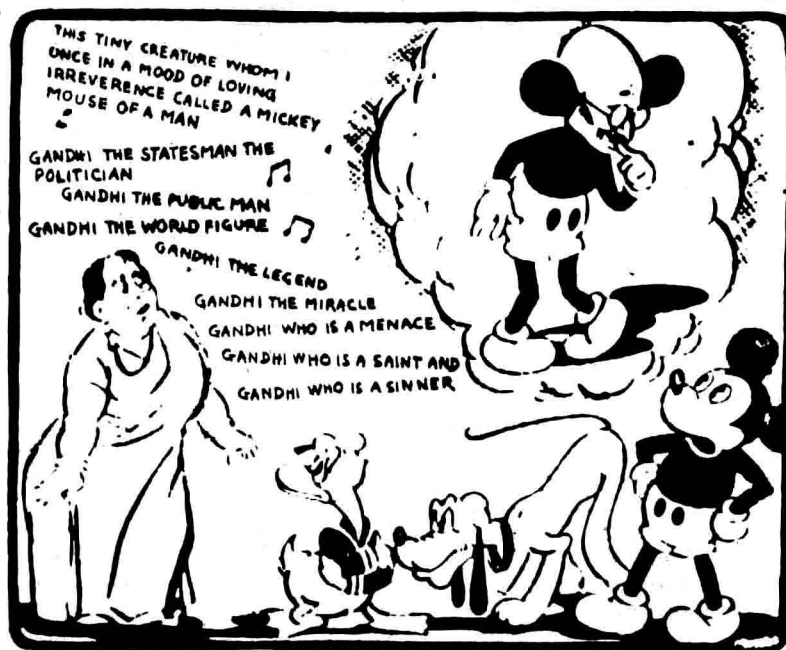
A. That may be historically true. But misapplication or an imperfect understanding of the law must not lead to the ignoring of the law itself. By constant striving we have to enrich the inheritance left to us. This law determines the duties of man. Rights follow from a due performance of duties. It is the fashion nowadays to ignore duties and assert or rather usurp rights.

Q. If you are so keen upon reviving *Varnashrama* why do you not favour violence as the quickest means?

A. Surely the question does not arise. Definition and performance of duties rules out violence altogether.

Q. Should we not confine our pursuit of truth to ourselves and not press it upon the world, because we know that it is ultimately limited in character?

A. You cannot so circumscribe truth even if you try. Every expression of truth has in it the seeds of propagation, even as the sun cannot hide its light.



MICKY MOUSE

Woman in a Man's Body

CONUNDRUM — By Jan Morris Faber and Faber, London 1974

Reviewed by Kamla Bhasin & Baljit Malik

James Morris, a well known journalist, writer and historian worked as an overseas correspondent for the London 'Times', the Manchester Guardian and the Arab News Agency in Cairo. He wrote eight books, most of them travelogues. *Conundrum*, published in 1974, is an autobiographical account which James Morris wrote after he became Jan Morris.

This book is about a mystery, a conundrum which thousands of people in the world must experience subconsciously without being able to articulate or understand it. It is about what has recently come to be known as trans-sexualism, experienced by the author as a passionate, life-long, ineradicable conviction of being born into the wrong sex. Trans-sexualism, Morris explains, is not an act of sex at all, it is not a sexual mode or preference. What this urge actually is and what are its causes is not exactly clear.

Even after he became a woman and ultimately felt at home in the new body, the phenomenon of trans-sexualism continued to be a dilemma — "a dilemma neither of the body nor of the brain, but of the spirit." He writes "that my conundrum might simply be a matter of penis or vagina, testicle or womb, seems to me still a contradiction in terms, for it concerned not my apparatus, but myself."

Convinced of Feminine Gender

Morris did not allow his trans-sexual dilemma to drive

him mad. He did not also try to artificially curb his urge to be a woman. He came to terms with his own urges and confused desires with understanding and courage. He had been convinced from his very childhood that he was a feminine gender and ultimately succeeded in acquiring a body to suit his real nature. *Conundrum* is thus a book born off the confusion and enigma of a man who became determined to pursue the feminine in him to its ultimate conclusion, an 'ultimate' that was no less than a total change of sex brought about after eight years consistent hormone treatment followed by three sessions of surgery. These eight years were preceded by a childhood, adolescence and manhood in which James Morris lived the life of a female in a male body.

James Morris had two great assets in his ordeal, adventure and eventual salvation. These were his parents who were extremely understanding and his brave and sympathetic wife, Elizabeth. Little did Elizabeth know that one day she would become her husband's 'sister-in-law'. When James became Jan and achieved the physical sexual transformation that he underwent, he decided to live with Elizabeth as Miss Morris, who could best be described as old James Morris's own sister.

Their's was a successful marriage in the conventional sense; a marriage that was personally a happy one for the family, but also one whose pleasures were diluted by the unique tragedy of James's personal dilemma. With James having become Jan, the children's father became their aunt. Their personal conundrum was resolved, but the situation must surely have persisted as a conundrum for the family. Yet,

according to the book, the family took the metamorphosis without too many traumas.

No Strong Sexual Ambitions

Strangely enough, his army days, which might have suppressed or even erased his feminine nature, actually enhanced his conviction that in reality he was more a woman than a man. He conceives of his time in the army as that of a woman "successfully disguised as a young man, who had been admitted to this closed and idiosyncratic male society." The army experience confirmed his intuition that he was fundamentally different from his male contemporaries. One of the main differences was that he had none of those strong, over powering sexual ambitions which so preoccupied the minds of his fellow officers.

Sweet Loving Advances

It is rather surprising that as an effeminate boy at school and then as a gentle, good looking young officer in the Army he did not attract the ridicule of those around him. Instead, his feminine nature seems to have been an advantage, for friends at school and in the army often went out of their way to be kind to him. He appears to have aroused the gallant and chivalrous instincts of the men around him. It did not end at gallantry and chivalry; on occasions he even became the object of physical male advances, not crude unpleasant ones, but rather sweet and loving ones — "Otto and I stood in the back of the open truck, for the pleasure of the ride ... and as we bumped across the open desert we stood closer for warmth, and he threw a great coat over both our shoulders ... and then Otto spoke. 'G-G-God', he said, 'I wish you were a woman.' Reply came there none, as the night swept by; but dear God, I would answer him now."

Woman in a Man's World

For those concerned with the liberation and emancipation of women, the most valid portion of the book is where the author looks at the position of women in society as a person having recently passed on from being a member of the dominant to the 'weaker' or oppressed sex. What Jan writes is not only interesting but also convincing and authoritative, for how many people can speak on the basis of their own personal experience as members of both sexes about the differential treatment meted out by society to men and women.

Jan Morris's sharp perception of a woman's place in a man's world is evident when she writes — "We are told that the social gap between the sexes is narrowing, but I can only report that having, in the second half of the 20th century, experienced life in both roles, there seems to me no aspect of existence, no moment of the day, no contact, no arrangement, no response

which is not different for men and for women."

About the effect such differential treatment has on the social behaviour, conduct, and psyche of women, Jan writes — "The more I was treated as a woman, the more woman I became. I adapted willy-nilly. If I was assumed to be incompetent at reversing cars or opening bottles, oddly incompetent I found myself becoming. ... Men treated me more and more as juniors ... my lawyer, in an unguarded moment one morning, even called me 'my child', and so, addressed every day of my life as an inferior, involuntarily, month by month I accepted the condition."

About how men feel about women in this day and age, even educated men, she discovered "prefer women to be less informed, less able, less talkative and certainly less self-centred than they are themselves, so I generally obliged them."

The latter part of the sentence quoted above will no doubt cause dismay and anger to feminists who would like to see the redemption of women from their existence as a category of second class human beings. Why should Jan Morris have felt inclined to oblige those members of the opposite sex who prefer women to play second fiddle to them? Why should she have allowed herself to be absorbed into the traditional role of a woman? With her unique experiences in the male and female world, she could have blazed open an original path for a New Woman in a new society. But this did not happen. Instead, she writes — "the subtle subjection of women was catching up on me, and I was adjusting to it in just the way women have adjusted down the generations."

Jan did not seem to find the process of adjustment at all unpleasant. In fact she began to like and to enjoy the advantages and attention women get as women in society.

Some might also not agree with Jan's contention that the genital organs make a difference

to the character of a person. For Jan, "there was to the presence of the penis something positive and stimulating. My body then was made to push and initiate, it is made now to yield and accept, and the outside change has had its inner consequence."

Gender and Sex

There is indeed a confusion (as there might well be in one who has been through an experience of no ordinary dimensions and consequences) in the writer's conception of sexuality and gender. Whereas sometimes she attaches specific importance to the physical aspect of being male or female, in other parts of the book a distinction is drawn between gender and sex. It appears that Jan as the former James, was in search of the feminine gender, which he had in reality already discovered, below his mother's piano. If gender is what counts ultimately, and has little to do with male or female in the sexual sense, then what was the need for all the surgery to effect the physical, sexual transformation?

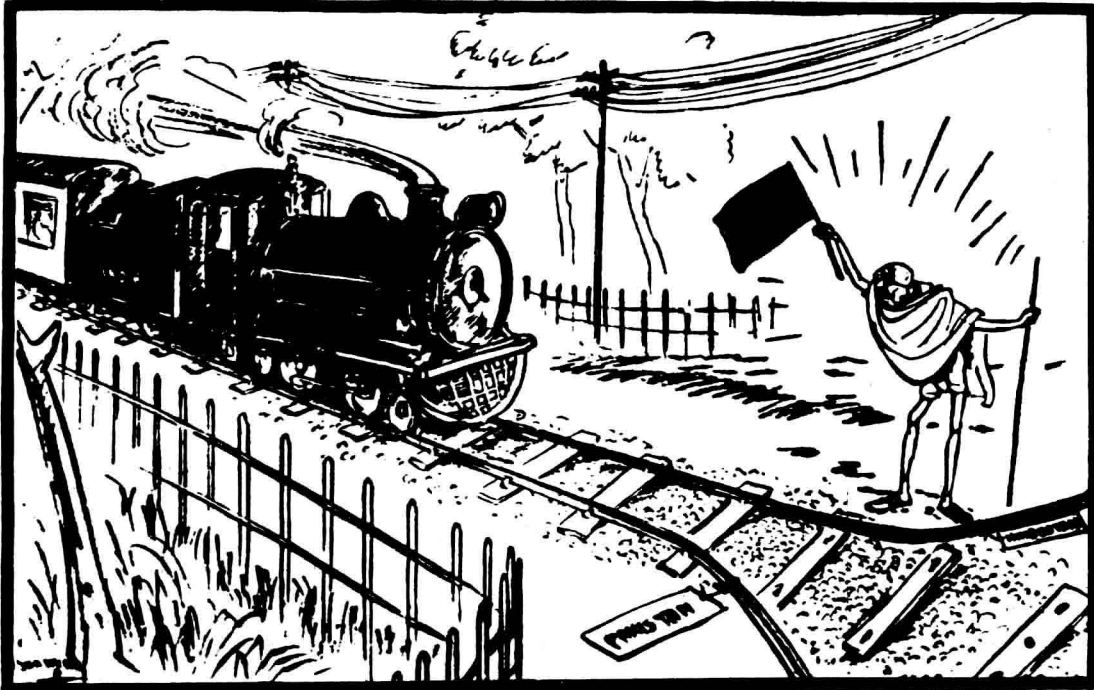
"To me gender", writes Jan "is not physical at all, but is altogether insubstantial. It is soul, perhaps, it is talent, it is taste, it is environment, it is how one feels, it is light and shade, it is inner music, it is a spring in one's step or an exchange of glances, it is more truly life and love than any combination of genitals, ovaries and hormones."

There is a tendency here to glorify and mystify womanhood which is further described in ecstatic terms as follows: "The nearest humanity approaches to perfection is in the persons of good women — and especially perhaps in the persons of kind, intelligent and healthy women past their menopause."

Conundrum must be welcomed as a contribution to the search that is going on for better personal and social understanding between the sexes, and also as a deeply sensitive description of the adventures of a daring person trying to live the many dimensions of human personality and sexuality. ●



Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan



DANGER SIGNAL

The summer of 1947. The partition of India. Ten million people in flight and almost a million dead. A historic event frozen in time, eclipsed by more recent history. And with it lies eclipsed, the human factor that makes up history. Were it not for literature, these men, women and children would remain mere statistics, for it is by focussing on the individual realities of an event that literature adds its dimension of timelessness to history. One such poignant focus is Khushwant Singh's *Train To Pakistan* written from the author's personal experience of partition; first published by Allen

and Unwin and now republished in paperback by The Grove Press, New York - 1986.

The story is sketched within the archetypal boundaries of Mano Majra, a sleepy little village on the banks of the Sutlej with its Sikh landowners, Muslim tenants and Hindu baniya. Complete are the proverbial landmarks of the mosque, the gurudwara and the house of the baniya. There is a railway station; ominous in its presence both in their everyday lives and future events. Within this framework the author weaves a rich collage of rustic modes and Punjabi traditions seducing the reader into a world where the

"families gather on the rooftops to sleep in the summer. Sitting on their charpoys, they eat their supper of vegetables and chapatis and sip hot creamy milk out of large copper tumblers and idle away the time until signal for sleep." It is this idyllic, complacent world that the plot begins to move irrevocably towards its horrific climax.

The plot is simple. Juggat Singh epitomises the Sikh peasant to perfection. Loud, fearless and simple-hearted, his passion for life is matched by his passion for his sloe-eyed Muslim girl friend Nooran. The gentle, sagacious Imam Baksh and the unassuming simpleton

Meet Singh are the village 'elders', heads of their respective religious orders and also symbolic of the bonhomie which exists between their two communities. A Deputy Commissioner Hukam Chand; lodging at an appropriate distance from the village, represents the presence of the State. Finally, there is Iqbal, messiah, of the socially conscious urban elite, whose presence the village treats, both with contempt and irony.

One day a 'ghost' train arrives from Pakistan. The village becomes vortex of shock, confusion and fear and "for the first time in the memory of Mano Majra, Imam Baksh's sonorous cry did not rise to the heavens to proclaim the glory of God." Hukam Chand sends word to the villagers that the 'muslims' are now 'refugees' who must leave for 'Pakistan'. These new terms and strange orders suddenly divide Mano Majra "as neatly as a knife cuts thorough a pat of butter". Friends, homes, lives and loves, all shattered by the dictums of men whose political ideologies and will have scarce room for the everyday world of Mano Majra. Without overstating, the author bares the anatomy of the ugly spate of lawlessness that follows, underscoring the vital point of how external forces with ulterior motives instigate and exploit to create disorder.

In a melodramatic climax Juggat Singh is shot while trying to save a train to Pakistan from ambush. In freeing the train he is perhaps meant to also free the readers from their abject



cynicism. For even though history continues to marginalise the role of the Juggat Singhs, literature continues to herald them as hope for the future.

A skillfully written novel, *Train To Pakistan* is of essential value as a social document. Adapt at descriptive prose, Khushwant Singh has provided a window on rural Punjab par excellence, complete with idiosyncracies and the verve of its people. The language is lucid, simple and rife with local colloquialisms and invective.

Punjab is once again on the brink of another socio-political upheaval and parallels are continuously drawn with 1947. Perhaps a reflection on the genesis of communal strife may unearth some vital truths. This novel provides a reflection. For it is only thorough the doors of literature that the sanctuaries of history reveal their solemn human shadows.

Jasjit Purewal.

We were told that the evenings of *Bhakti Aur Sangeet* from 24-30 September had been organised to mark the 125th birth anniversary of Rabindra Nath Tagore.

It was the 25th evening. September skies washed by late monsoon showers. Music and devotional songs from a platform overlaid with a mango tree on the lawns of the Sangeet Natak Akademi. Folk and classic; religion, sensuous delight and pathos ... the myriad strains of the spirit of woman and man. Sufi, Hindu and Sikh traditions: Sufiana Kalam, Gurbani, Bhajans Qawwali and Ghazal blending in love and praise of the Almighty. Feelings of a mellow yet robust flair for life.

Bhakti was more than devotion and prayer; it was also protest. It broke rules; it created new rules, it broke barriers, it unwound suppressed feelings, it liberated.

Returning home I ran my fingers through our bookshelf. And what did I find? A book on Bulleh Shah, the rebel saint and 'poet folkster' from 17th-18th century Punjab.

My body and mind were still soaked with the powerful folk melodies and lyrics of Puran Chand Vadali and his group as they poured out a delightful repertoire of Baba Farid's *slokes* and Bulleh Shah's *kafis*.

As I turned the two pages of the book: Bulleh Shah: A Selection; Vanguard Publications Ltd., Lahore-1982, my eyes came to

rest on an inscription for my wife from a friend in that citadel of the Punjabi ethos. It read: *Punjab has no borders-you and I recognise none either!*

The message was of the same essence as the evening, an evening beyond the borders of religious divide, political chicanery and national decay.

The music entered the bloodstream with a fusion of protest and devotion:

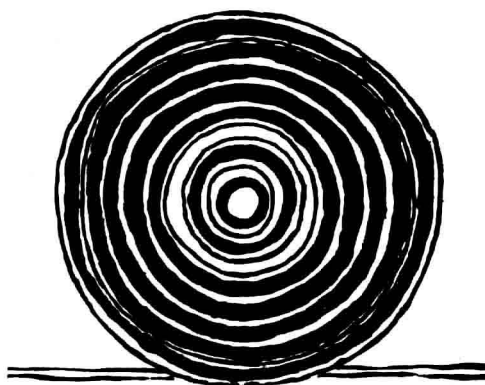
To Bulleh people give advice. O Bulleh, go and sit in the mosque. What avails it going to

the mosque if the heart has not said the prayer? What matters it being pure outside when from inside the dirt has not gone. Without a perfect teacher, says Bulleh, your prayers are of no avail. Into the fire the prayers! in the mud the fast of Ramzan; over the Kalima black has passed. Says Bulleh Shah, the Lord is met from within me, but the people are searching elsewhere.

Gurbani and Qawalli

The mood had been set, and into it came the Singh Bandhu-

BHAKTI AUR SANGEET



SANGEET NATAK AKADEMI
24-30 September 1986
Rabindra Bhavan Lawns
New Delhi-110001

Tejpal Singh and Surinder Singh with their rendition of shabads from Gurbani. Virtuoso duet singing in pure Malkauns and then in the catchy folksy style of kirtan as it is sung in gurudwaras.

And then to round off the "evening without an end" was the Qawwali, Ghazal and Manqabat of Jaffar Hussian Khan and his group.

To put it as Rabindranath Tagore might have done, *Bhakti Aur Sangeet* opened up the heart to the doors of perception "where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit..."

A sublime experience ... the mood lingered on till it came to settle at the daily mundane level of discord, distrust, conflict, devotionless protest, fear ... and all the cesspools of dead habit that is the lot of those who have had the likes of Nanak, Bulleh and Farid for ancestors.

Baljit Malik

A Safe Place

*So that none will run before or behind
Let us go to a place where all are blind.*

Embrace Me, Love

*Embrace me, love, and hold me next your heart.
What sinister jungles stand in my way,
What snakes, what beasts of prey,
and on the other side what spirits start.
Reach out your hand to me so fear may cease.
One glimpse of you and I shall be at peace.
Embrace me, love, and hold me next your heart.*

Bulleh Shah: Rendered into English verse
by Taufiq Rafat.

Jagatjit Industries Limited

The Spirit of
Excellence

A Government That Leaps Before It Looks

Do we have a government that leaps before it looks? Is the Prime Minister being wrongly advised? Is the present government's 'ad hoc' style of functioning a result of his own perceptions on issues critical for the country's immediate and more distant future?

Mr Rajiv Gandhi's categorical judgement that the Gorkhaland National Liberation Front's agitation is not anti-national, fails to convince in the face of Subash Gheising's published speeches and press interviews. It brings comfort only to GNLf militants. The Prime Minister's 'clean chit', given without any condemnation of Gheising's inflammatory orations and threats of violence, even of secession, have encouraged GNLf agitators. The Army is out again in Darjeeling. The Left Front West Bengal government, faced with Gheising's increasing militancy and popularity, finds itself hedged in on all sides.

The West Bengal government has gone a fair way towards meeting GNLf demands — Nepali is the official second language of the state, the state government is committed to a certain degree of autonomy for the hill areas, which have received more development under this regime than they did under the Congress government. But the Prime Minister has publicly rebuked them for neglecting the hill districts, at the same time asserting that there will be no constitutional changes to allow for regional autonomy. Gorkhaland, he says, is a subject for the state to handle. Does this imply that he considers it only a law and order problem?

At the same time Gheising has released a letter to him from the Home Minister, assuring the GNLf leader that he will be called to Delhi for talks. If Gorkhaland is the State government's responsibility, why should Central government leaders summon Gheising to New Delhi? If the Centre's interference is warranted, it should be only to demand that Gheising withdraw his letter to the King of Nepal, also circulated to other foreign countries, which is pre-eminently anti-Indian, both in tone and content. It appears that New Delhi has paid insufficient attention to the consequences of the Prime Minister's absolution and the Home Minister's actions. Unless party politics were the decisive factor, with national interests relegated to secondary importance.

Another instance of lack of homework, wilful or thoughtless, is the recent proposal of the "security belt" on the western border. After a great deal of publicity, controversy and threatened confrontation between the Bimala government and the Centre — the Punjab government was not consulted most unfortunate from the point of view of national interests — Mr Julius Ribeiro, who should certainly know what he is talking about, has stated that he is against the idea. As the 'man on the spot' in more ways than one, he was obviously not consulted on this vital matter. Now the government is backpedalling on the security belt.

Again, Union Minister of State Ghulam Nabi Azad's letter to Mr. Chitta Basu, declaring that the All Assam Students' Union's radical proposals regarding 'special status' are under the "consideration of the government" and the Home Ministry's subsequent public denial of the press report on the letter, is another disturbing example of what can, unhappily, be called the government's ineptness, some say irresponsibility. Was Mr Azad ignorant of the implications of the AASU's proposals which plainly contradict certain clauses of the Assam Accord?

"Special status" under Article 370 of the Constitution is being interpreted in various ways, by the Mizo National Front, the AASU, the Akalis and others. This requires clear definition. But only after in depth consultations with a broad nationwide representation, keeping in view the country's integrity, reasonable demands for greater state autonomy and the political imperatives of the present Indian situation. This is an urgent matter. The present ad hoc approach to this potentially explosive issue is highly dangerous.

The Mizo settlement is another instance of 'instant solution' approach to complex problems. The arbitrary removal of the Chief Minister of a party elected in a democratic poll, and his replacement by the leader of a 20 year old bloody, bitter insurgency, who makes no secret of his erstwhile connections with the Chinese and Pakistanis, holds future implications dangerous to the democratic process. Mr Laldenga is still talking about 'special status' and 'Greater Mizoram', issues which will be used in the future election campaign. Why were these issues not settled before the settlement?

However, the harm has been done. Can any government afford such fumbling and faltering.

*"The age is like a Knife, Kings are butchers
the law hath taken wings and flown;
In the dark night of falsehood
I cannot espy the rising of the moon of truth."*

Liberal Answer to Punjab Terrorism

Balraj Puri

What would have Mahatma Gandhi or Jayaprakash Narayana done in the present situation in Punjab? And what are their countless followers doing today?

As the believers in non-violence, moral force, liberal values and communal amity are establishing their total irrelevance in the troubled state, how do they hope to stem the emerging tide of fundamental intolerance and communal violence all over the country?

Punjab is certainly not more explosive than Noakhali in terms of popular hysteria. Nor are Sikh terrorists necessarily made of a more brutal stuff than the dacoits of Chambal.

As compared to Gandhi's influence on Muslims and JP's appeal to the followers of Marxism and Leninism, there are hosts of eminent national leaders who have won the hearts of the Sikh community by their courageous espousal of its cause. Chandra Shekhar, George Fernandes, Surendra Mohan, Inder Kumar Gujral, Kuldip Nayyar, V.M. Tarkunde and Ram Jethmalani are among those who outraged national sentiment by their outspokenness, in varying degrees, in opposing Operation Blue Star, exposing the "hidden hand" behind the anti-Sikh riots of November 1984 and documenting the excesses of what was called state terrorism in Punjab. It is true that the Akali leadership let them down badly. It did not accommodate any one of its erstwhile friends as candidates for the Assembly or Parliament elections. Far from sharing power with liberal Hindu leaders of the State, none was associated with the new government even in an advisory capacity.

Not Ingratitude But Short-Sightedness

It is not a question of Akali ingratitude but of shortsightedness. For by thus seeking to eliminate Hindu liberals from the state's politics, Akalis contributed to its further drift towards communal extremism which, in the process, eroded Akali ground. The resultant atmosphere of hatred, suspicion and violence provided much needed sanctuary to the terrorists.

The Akali Dal missed an opportunity to project a composite Punjabi identity which would have enhanced its emotional appeal among the Sikh masses. For the appeal of Punjabi identity is as powerful as of the Sikh identity. But by opting for an exclusively Sikh framework of politics, the Dal agreed to play, so to say, on the wicket of the extremists.

Misplaced Modesty of Hindu Liberals

It was a misplaced modesty on the part of the Hindu liberals not to assert for their representation in power and for building a composite Punjabi identity. They abdicated what ever right they had to leader-

ship of Punjabi Hindus who are being driven to directionless and frustrated misadventures.

The non-Sikh liberals did a remarkable job as a bridge between the Akalis and the Centre. But they completely disregarded the more vital tasks of building a liberal framework and of strengthening the bridge itself. Once the accord was reached, the bridge was dispensed with.

But a more fatal flaw in their approach was that no effort was made to construct a bridge where it was needed most, viz between the principal communities of the state and to provide a political expression of a Punjabi identity through some arrangement for sharing of political power between them. Hindu-Sikh relations and not Centre-Sikh relations or Haryana-Sikh relations constitute the crux of the Punjab problem.

Perceptions of the Accord

The only meaningful part of the Punjab accord was its unstated part which led to the return to power of the Akali Dal. But the manner in which the accord was signed and power was transferred, blunted the role of the Dal as an instrument of Sikh protest as also of a Punjabi identity.

The accord had raised extremely divergent expectations among the Sikh masses and the rest of the nation. The divergence was temporarily bridged by the martyrdom of Sant Longowal. Again, the Akali victory was wrongly taken as a measure of Sikh endorsement of the accord. For the main issue in the elections was whether the Punjab should be ruled by the Congress (I) or the Akalis. Most of the Sikhs, disgruntled as they were, preferred the latter as the lesser evil.

More energy was spent by liberals on promoting the Akali Dal's understanding with the central leadership than on providing avenues to Sikh anger, which was driven to express itself "through other means". The question is not whether the Sikh anger was justified or whether the measures taken by the Government of India to redress Sikh grievances were adequate. The real question is whether the system can provide outlets for even unjustified anger and whether aggrieved people can articulate their grievances through peaceful means.

The attempts to seek a solution of Sikh terrorism through concessions from the Centre in a way implied treating Hindus of Punjab as hostages for the policies of New Delhi. The dissident Akali leader Prakash Singh Badal stated it more explicitly when he declared that terrorism would not end till Sikh detainees in Jodhpur were released and victims of November riots and army deserters were rehabilitated.

Duty of Liberals

It is a duty of liberals to uphold the right of the extremists to agitate for these and even

more extremist demands. But it is also their duty to mobilise resistance to the terrorist form of agitation. This form of terrorism needs to be dealt with effectively and not explained away as a culmination of a long history of Sikh frustrations. For every frustration need not cause mental disorder.

Sikh terrorism is of a qualitatively different kind than any other form of terrorism known in the history of India and possibly elsewhere. For it is not mainly directed against the State or its functionaries and supporters, as is usually the case, but against innocent citizens who are not even remotely responsible for the alleged Sikh grievances.

In a way it is also against the basic tenets of Sikhism and the entire Sikh tradition. For what can contradict Guru Nanak's message more than the cult of hatred and violence being preached by the terrorists? While the soldiers of Guru Gobind Singh healed the wounds of the enemy during the wars imposed on him, the terrorists are killing those who are neither enemy nor armed. Again, in recent times during the movement for liberation of gurudwaras in the twenties, the Sikhs set the most rigorous standard of non-violent struggle under Gandhi's strict guidance. As against the Sikh tradition of compassion, sacrifice and bravery, the terrorists are trying to start a new tradition of brutality and cowardice. In terms of the interest of the community, terrorism would become increasingly counter-productive.

Thus while the Hindu minority in the state has a legitimate right to seek security of life, terrorism poses a far graver threat to the spiritual and political interests of the Sikh community.

In this sense, any role that liberal-secular groups may play in containing terrorism should be viewed more in continuation of their defence of the Sikh interests in the recent past than as a balancing device between their sympathies for the Hindus and Sikhs communities.

To the extent terrorism has a political dimension and needs to be dealt with at a political level, liberals, Gandhians, humanists and civil libertarians have a role to play. For they are in a better position to a) start a dialogue with the extremists and try to dissuade them from methods of terrorism, b) mobilise Sikh masses within and outside the Punjab against terrorism and c) to contribute towards evolving a Punjabi identity at a political level.

*The sense of defeatism and resignation that has overtaken these groups betrays a lack of perception about their own role and of the reality of the situation. One only hopes that the spirit of Gandhi and JP will reassert itself before it is too late.

The author, a well known political commentator, is Director of the Institute of Jammu and Kashmir Studies

Two Months in Canada, the U.S., and the U.K.

Amrik Singh

A recent visit abroad enabled me to get some idea at first hand of what Indians in USA, UK and Canada are feeling and thinking about events in their former homeland. Almost everyone I met wanted to discuss the Punjab issue. This was the one subject uppermost in their minds. Some approached it from the point of view of the future of the Indian polity, others referred to it in terms of the persecution to which Sikhs have been subjected for a long time.

Most reactions were along predictable lines. Non-Sikhs referred to the continued terrorism and Sikhs referred to the persecution to which they were being subjected and the bad faith of the Central Government in not living up to the terms of the Rajiv-Longwal Accord. This was not unlike what one encounters in India. There was one difference however, and rather a crucial one.

In the countries I visited, I found very little social interaction between Hindus and Sikhs unlike the situation here where, despite differing perceptions, social interaction has not diminished, though it has suffered a setback of sorts. This is true both in the Punjab and Delhi, the two areas I know.

This is not to suggest that perceptions do not differ here and thinking does not run along two parallel lines. That is so; nevertheless when people are thrown together they interact with one another and the social commerce continues as before. However, both in North America and UK I found that they moved in separate orbits and there was little interaction. This is partly because in the course of their daily work they are not required to interact. Most persons at work would be local residents and not Indians. When Indians seek out one another therefore, they turn to their own kind. Hindus seek out Hindus and Sikhs seek out Sikhs. This is an important difference between the Indian situation and, let us say, the North American — British situation.

An Endless Debate and Divide

It all goes back to the 1984 days. The Sikhs felt hurt at what had happened in Amritsar and the others felt wounded and outraged at the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. In regard to the November '84 riots, there was very little attempt to see situation in objective terms. Those who felt hurt at the attack on the Golden Temple did not feel all that bothered

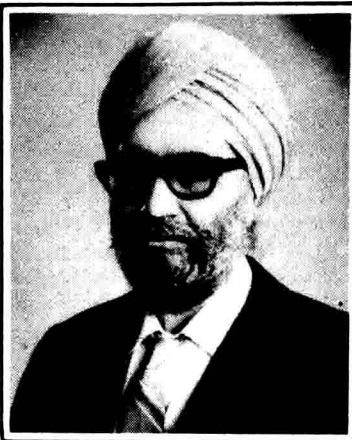
about the assassination. Those who felt hurt by the November riots would not condone what the government did or failed to do. The real tragedy of contemporary India is that perceptions differ so widely and so fundamentally. Whether these will change after some time or not remains to be seen. All that one can say is that as long as these perceptions continue unchanged the situation will not change; it can only get worse.

To be more specific, there was severe condemnation of terrorism by the non-Sikhs. I was in New York when the news of Gen. Vaidya's assassination was received. Once again the reaction was along predictable lines. Those who deplored the assassination were asked to account for the state terrorism that had started in June '84 and had continued unabated with the November '84 killings and all that has followed since then. Those who did not feel bothered about the assassination and saw it as inevitable had little to say about the havoc being wreaked on the polity by terrorist activities. It is an endless debate and nobody knows where and how it will end.

Private Set Of Angels And Devils

Everyone looks at the situation in terms of his sympathies and social and family affiliations. By now everyone has his private set of angels and devils, so to speak. It is a situation where I and my people are right and the others (whoever they) are wrong. Nobody stops to ask the question if what has been happening during the last few years is not a distortion of our political life and the real issue is not terrorism and what preceded and followed it, but the manner in which communalism has been deliberately fanned in order to get political mileage out of it.

Bhindranwale would not have become a menace that he did but for the manner in which he was allowed to succeed. Nor would Operation Bluestar have been unavoidable; had there been no intention to reap political harvest from such a venture. Whether it happens tomorrow or ten years later, one of these days the country would have to recognise that what the ruling party did in the early 80's was in the interest of its political survival and not for the health or vitality of the Indian state; on the contrary it did grievous damage to it. Communalism is a dangerous and self-defeating weapon to use. Once introduced, it marches from



strength to strength and that is precisely what is happening.

Disbelief or Indifference

On a couple of occasions when I tried to shift the discussion somewhat away from the immediate issues and discuss things in the larger context, the response was either disbelief or indifference. This shows to what extent the communal poison has seeped into our thinking. In India there is some chance, one day, of new elements being introduced in the political bloodstream. In foreign countries it cannot happen on its own; in any case it takes much longer for anything comparable to sprout and flower on alien soil. When we in India have not even started in the reverse gear, it is idle to complain that Indians living abroad should think differently. And yet the amount of damage this is doing to the Indian community as a whole is unbelievable. They are divided into two different if not hostile camps. Some of the Americans to whom I talked were aware of this dimension of the problem; without being too forthright they thought that the whole thing was amusing as well as phoney. The smirk of superiority on their faces was too obvious to be missed.

Negative Role of Media and Indian Missions

The role of the media in this connection requires to be referred to. There are not many Indian newspapers published locally in those countries. For the rest it is the periodicals published in India which sooner or later (later rather than sooner) find their way into Indian homes. Most of them project the Sikhs as anti-national and unpatriotic. This is a line of approach which has been pushed insistently indeed relentlessly, since the early 80's. Even the last general election was fought around this issue. Whatever has happened since then has not led to a reconsideration of what was deliberately and even maliciously pro-

jected in the early 80's. No wonder the perceptions continue to be different and will indeed remain so, as long as this line of approach is not reversed. As if this was not bad enough, lack of information (without the right focus) is aggravated by distortions born of distance.

What gets projected through the media is more or less duplicated by the missions abroad. There is a lot of criticism of their work. One particular story which I picked up in Canada may be retold here for the light that it throws on how things are being handled. In British Columbia the Sikhs collected a sum of 3,00,000 dollars for the establishment of a Chair in Sikh Studies in the University of British Columbia. The system in Canada is that an equal amount is contributed by the Federal government, which is then set apart as an endowment placed at the disposal of the university and the income from it is utilised for meeting the salary and other expenses relating to the project. When the sum was collected and handed over to the University of British Columbia, the expectation was that the matching share from the Federal government would be forthcoming within the next few months and such a Chair would get established.

Almost the years have gone by since the initiative for the establishing the Chair was first taken. In no such project undertaken in the past has there been so much delay. *It is widely believed that the Indian mission got into the act and put pressure upon the Federal government not to support the project.* Whether this is correct or not, nobody will ever know. But there seems to be no other explanation for the Federal government dragging its feet over the matter.

In this connection it may not be out of place to mention that British Columbia is a part of Canada to which the Sikhs went first of all in the 90's of the last century and has the largest concentration of Sikh population. If the Federal government disregards this particular move by a group of people in a province where they have something like a political muscle as well, there must be very strong reasons for the Federal Government not doing what it has always done in similar cases.

The question to ask here is: does this kind of a thing help in the perceptions coming closer or does it widen the gulf which already exists? The Indian polity, as far as I can judge, has so far not cured itself of this perverted way of thinking that a section of the society, if it chooses to strengthen its own sense of individual identity, is going against the interest of the Indian society as a whole. It is this way of thinking which is at the root of our problems. Terrorism and counter terrorism will disappear in no time, once it is accepted that every single community or social grouping is free to develop its own identity and in doing so it is also

strengthening the Indian society and not only itself. The signal perversion of Indian politics today is the repeated identification between certain sections of the society with the Indian state from which those who do not fit the pattern are either excluded or are sought to be excluded.

What About Khalistan?

What about Khalistan? The issue is referred to again and again. The general impression in India is that almost every Sikh abroad believes in Khalistan. This is both true and untrue. It is true in the sense that people feel greatly embittered at the way the Sikhs are being treated in India. This is aggravated further by the difficulty of securing a visa to visit India. Perhaps no single thing causes greater frustration and sourness than the fact that a large number of them are unable to get a visa to visit India to see their kith and kin.

From what I could gather, it is only partly suspicion or cussedness; for the greater part it is bureaucratic bungling. In using this phrase one refers to the lack of sympathy for the other person's concerns. What somebody in London told me illustrates the point. An Indian businessman a non-Sikh at that has his widowed mother living in Jullundar. He is the only son. Consequently he keeps in fairly close touch with her. After the November '84 riots he wanted to fly out almost at once. The problem however was that in his application he happened to mention Jullundar as his destination. He need not have done so; there was no problem in his mother travelling to Delhi and spending some time with him there. His application however remained pending for over three months. In fact the problem was resolved when he ran into a college friend who was in the foreign service. He got the matter sorted out within 24 hours and so the man was able to visit Delhi and Jullundar. He was bitter at the utter lack of sympathy and understanding on the part of our diplomatic officials.

To come back to Khalistan. It must be conceded that there is a considerable amount of sympathy for the notion. But the moment one wishes to understand something about the notion, who believe in it begin to flounder. They are unable to answer even simple questions like what would be the attitude of Pakistan to the proposition. This does not however stop people from talking about it. My own assessment is that most people talk more about it out of a feeling of frustration and bitterness than serious belief in it. Some do, and their presence need not be disregarded. But to attach any more importance to it than to take notice of them would not be correct. In fact, as I see it, the greater danger comes from those who believe that unless everybody agrees with them they have no place in the national ethos. It is this mode of thinking which needs to be watched more rather than a few angry expressions of feeling expressed about Khalistan. ●

NEWSHOUND



By Rap

CHULHEWALI MAI

Some years ago, Mrinal Gore the fiery socialist, was dubbed 'Paniwali Bai' by the slum-dwellers of Bombay. She had successfully led their struggle to force the Bombay Municipal Corporation to provide adequate drinking water for the slum-dwellers. Now Chandigarh has come up with its own 'Chulhewali Mai' — **Madhu Sarin**, an architect by profession.

Firewood shortage in India has become acute due to massive deforestation. Among the worst affected are rural women. In many parts of the country, village women spend several hours a day in collecting firewood for their families' meals. According to the Citizens' Re-

port on the State of India's Environment, these women often end up walking about 1500 kms annually with headloads of firewood scavenged from wasted lands.

Innovative Response

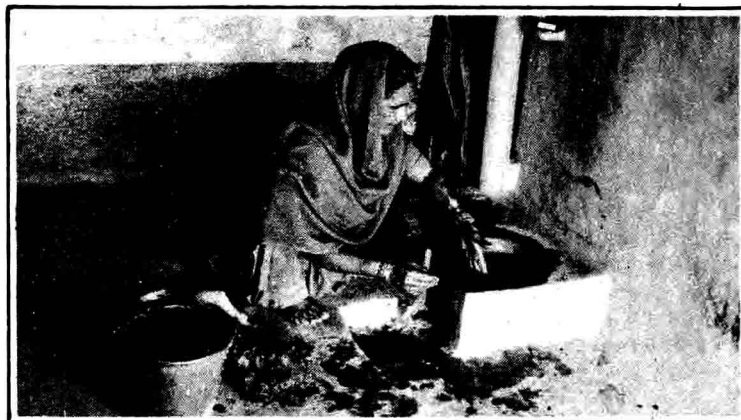
One innovative response to mitigate the women's drudgery has been to improve the design of chulhas, so that the wood is burnt more efficiently. The energy efficiency of a typical chulha is barely 5-10 per cent. Improved chulhas can easily double this figure.

Madhu Sarin first became interested in designing an improved chulha when she saw a woman in Nada village, outside Chandigarh, literally suffocating

from smoke while cooking on a traditional chulha.

With the help of the Nada women, Madhu designed a stove that has a chimney which allows the smoke to escape outside. A damper between the chimney and the pot holes controls the airflow. She consulted the women about the location of the chulha, its size, the number and size of pot holes desired, and the food habits of the family.

By involving the village women directly in the design and construction of the smokeless chulha, Madhu was able to generate a high degree of interest from other households. Her highly personalised approach also paid rich dividends in terms of user — satisfaction.



Interest Runs High

Interest in the new stove ran high among the Nada households. "My husband never did anything to improve the chulha," said one woman, "but now he forbids me to use the old smoky chulha." Women claim that they can boil about 12 litres of water on the new chulha, with the same amount of wood that was used to boil 7 litres on the old ones.

The reduced exposure to smoke due to the improved chulha is a major boon for women. A study in Gujarat shows that in three hours of cooking in a smoky kitchen, a woman can inhale carcinogenic substances that are equivalent to smoking 20 packs of cigarettes. Exposure to woodsmoke is particularly damaging for malnourished, anaemic women, since carbon monoxide in the smoke can increase the effect of anaemia.

To cope with the increasing demand for the 'Nada Chulha', Madhu Sarin has trained village women to build the chulhas.

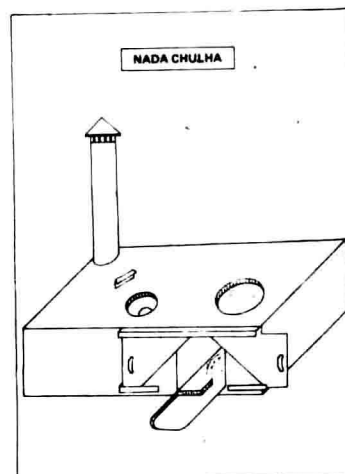


Figure taken from 'Improved Cook Stoves', Editor Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Deptt. of Non-conventional Energy Sources, Ministry of Energy, New Delhi, 1986, p. 76

Her services and expertise are now sought by various agencies both in India and abroad.

"Sarin is today the most successful improved stove disseminator in India," says the Second Citizens' Report on the State of India's Environment.



Taking the Media by Storm

Lakhinder Vohra

THE MUSLIM WOMEN'S BILL may have evoked a nationwide response, but it set eight young women on the path to making their first film.

Deciding to capture the passage of the Bill through the Parliament vis-a-vis debate, its pros and cons with experts as well as some affected muslim women, the 55-minute documentary entitled, IN SECULAR INDIA, brought together eight graduates in mass communication from Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) comprising Sabeena Gadihoke, Sabina Kidwai, Shohini Ghosh, Ranjani Mazumdar, Shikha Jhingan, Charu Gargi, V Maithili and Roma Gupta. They decided to work under the banner of their own newly created group — MEDIA STORM.

"The issue in itself was so



Young women at work: The 8 members of Media Storm thrash out issues by keenly debating their pros and cons.

controversial that we decided to take the media by storm", remarked bespectacled Ghosh, with Gadihoke adding, "We wanted to rake up the issue via our medium, feeling it concerned not women in isolation, but an entire civilised society."

Describing the film as an experience of a lifetime, Maithili recounted, how Media Storm ever since its inception in March '86, had to face acute financial problems, which had eventually shown on the film, which lacked technical finesse. "At times, we borrowed money off our parents and friends to keep it going", said Kidwai. "All because we were denied all sorts of institutional help, as our area of work was considered sensitive and controversial. Even our parent organisation, JMI, denied us open sup-

port," she added. Another problem faced by the group, was red-tapism. Majumdar remarked, "Getting in touch with people was another uphill task. Especially getting past P.As and sometimes double P.As. For instance, we couldn't interview Begum Abida Ahmed, because it was extremely difficult to speak to her. Even otherwise, people had all kinds of reservations. We were simply refused permission to film the Jama Masjid, and our request to meet the Imam Bukhari, too, was turned down." She also described in detail the stiff opposition they had to face at the hands of Muslim fundamentalists. "At times, we were even refused access to some divorced women. In fact, in Shakarpur basti, when we insisted, we just got thrown out."

"Even if the group got to

meet some women, they would n't just speak, fearing the family name would be dragged in or sometimes, her parents wouldn't agree. And that's a major handicap in the film. It lacked characters," replied Ghosh.

But there were some interesting incidents too. Like, one of the members, upon being refused to shoot the Wakf board site situated in the middle of a Kabristan, going up to authorities and claiming that she was making a film on the tourist spots in Delhi. The authorities then promptly agreed.

But is the group going to concentrate on Women's issues?

"No", replied one of them, "It would be incorrect to brand us as a women's organisation. Our first venture was on a burning national problem, and so will be the others. We feel strongly about communalism, at the same time, on the education policy as well. It all depends. Something might just crop up tomorrow and we'll be back."

"We also feel strongly about female infanticide," added another member. WHILE MEDIA-STORM CONTINUES to make news, it is already beginning to face incipient problems. The group has received complaints of some Madhu, Sanjay, and Gita collecting donations on behalf of the group. "They don't belong to us. Will you please clarify this in your article", pleads Gadihoke.

But doesn't all this make you famous?

"No", replied Ghosh, firmly adding, "We were insignificant earlier and now just a little unknown."

While IN SECULAR INDIA awaits the censors certificate, the group plans to reorganise itself and improve upon the technical flaws in the film.

But, isn't all's well, that ends well.

"No", says Gadihoke, summing up, "Even after the film is complete, we need about thirty to thirty-five thousand rupees to clear away our debts. And sincerely speaking, were waiting for people to react."

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President Enthralls Jassa Singh Seminar

Gazette News Service

Forty scholars from all over the country met in Delhi on September 20 and 21 at a seminar highlighting Babba Jassa Singh Ahluwalia's role as a "Secular and National Hero", organised by the Baba Jassa Singh (1718-1783) Bicentenary Committee. The aim of the seminar was to encourage research on the life and times of a man, who was not only a great general, but also a man of deep faith, and a statesman, whose military prowess secured the Punjab, and the nation, from the Afghan invaders, and whose secular policy and political sagacity laid the foundations of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's kingdom.

Inaugurating the seminar the President, Giani Zail Singh, speaking in Punjabi, pointed out that "Jassa Singh was a true secular democrat and a saint soldier. Today everyone talks about secularism but to be a secular person in the 18th century Punjab was a big thing." Speaking extempore, the President held the rapt attention of his audience with his wit, and ironic humour, commenting on the present times. "Why should a secular state bother who will manage the gurudwaras?" he asked. He warned the research scholars, intellectuals, historians, professors and Vice-Chancellors attending the seminar never to indulge in sycophancy, not to distort historic facts.

Referring to how Nawab Kapur Singh was given the title of Nawab in an attempt to stop him from creating problems for the Mughals, and Jassa Singh was named Sultan-ul-Qaum, he related how, while they accepted these titles, the two leaders did not allow themselves to be corrupted by power. If they had, he said, they and their followers would have lost their energy and virility, and they would have been content to guard the status quo. Their homes would

no longer have been their saddles. In an obvious reference to the present Indian condition he stated "It is sin to impose your religion on the people when you are in power. But the bigger sin is to give up your religion when you are in power."

Eminent historians, Professors Satish Chandra, S.S. Bal, Hari Ram Gupta, J.S. Grewal and B.R. Grover chaired the academic sessions. The proceedings brought out the discovery of original documents about Baba Jassa Singh and his times in the archives of Rajasthan and Maharashtra, which will form the basis for further research and analysis of the turbulent 18th century in the Punjab regarding the Sikhs, the Mughals, the Marathas and others. Dr (Mrs) M.K. Gill brought out a unique quality of Jassa Singh, his respect for women, evidence of which is found in the rescue of 22,000 women, captured by Ahmed Shah Abdali, by the Dal Khalsa after the battle of Panipat. Not only were the women rescued but they were taken to their homes in Rajasthan, Punjab and other places. Dr Gill also related the story of an individual lady, a certain Begum, who asked for Jassa Singh's protection and received it.

Veteran Sikh historian Professor Hari Ram Gupta delighted the eminent audience with his anecdotes about the Sultan-ul-Qaum, relating how he towered above all others in battle, on a horse which was taller than any other. He was not given to drink, or to women, said Dr Gupta, but certainly, in battle, he took some 'bhang'. He consumed large quantities of butter at breakfast and finished half a goat at dinner!

Summing up the proceedings in a Valedictory Address, Punjab Chief Minister Surjit Singh Barnala paid tribute to Babba Jassa

Singh about whom he said too little was known. He had set the pattern for Maharajah Ranjit Singh and he had stopped the British advance on Delhi for many years. Mr Barnala pointed out that the only two persons who had merited the popular title of "Bandi Chor" in the whole of Indian history were Guru Hargovind and Babba Jassa Singh, both of whom had won fame for releasing prisoners. It had not mattered to Jassa Singh who the women were whom he freed. There were Hindus, and also women in burqqas, but he had no communal approach. He had saved "Hindustan q izzat". These were the times when the Sikhs lived up to their highest ideals of fighting against injustice and helping the victims of repression and 'sardari' was honoured and respected. Now, when the blood of innocents is being shed, "Sardari is being destroyed", the Chief Minister said with emotion. "We need a man like Jassa Singh Ahluwalia to get us back on the right road."

In conclusion Mr Barnala deplored the narrow outlook in India — "We imprison our leaders" he explained. "Jassa Singh was not just an Ahluwalia. He belonged to all of us. We are acclaiming him as a 'Sikh' hero. But he was a national hero. Like Guru Gobind Singh, who was not only a Sikh, he was a national figure. He did so much for the nation. He made perhaps the greatest sacrifice anyone has made in history." Not for a narrow religious cause, the Chief Minister continued, but for the secular ideal. "We call the Guru Granth Sahib the 'Sikh' scriptures. But the Guru Granth Sahib is the most secular of writings, containing the works of so many, of Muslims, of Kasais, of weavers and others. Yet we say it is 'Sikhanda granth'."

Anti-Repression Meet in Bhatinda

Gazette News Service

A resolution of the Anti-Repression convention held at Bhatinda on September 7, 1986 demanded unconditional release of the Jodhpur detainees, the rehabilitation of army deserters, a judicial enquiry into all the police encounters, cancellation of the proposed security belt and punishment to those who were responsible for the post-assassination killings of Sikhs in various parts of the country.

Organised by the Anti-Repression Coordination Committee, representing more than 10 progressive mass organisations, the convention was dominated by leftists of many shades. Representatives of different Sikh organisations, except the ruling Akali Dal also participated. Speakers described the shrill cries for national integration and the so-called threats to the unity of the country as a convenient whip with to punish those who demand justice.

All the speakers declared India to be a pluralistic society, with many ethnic nationalities. The convention saw no harm in the demand for separate states by different nationalities of the country.

The Chairman of the Indian Peoples Front Mr. Nag Bhushan Patnayak, held the Centre and State Governments responsible for the rise of terrorist activities in the country. State terrorism was the real problem, he said and individual terrorism only a corollary. He accused the State of staging fake encounters in order to suppress progressive forces. He condemned the Centre's discriminatory policy in dealing with the Punjab situation. If the government could negotiate with Laldenga, he asked, why should it hesitate to have a dialogue with the Sikh youth. He saw a similarity bet-

ween the Sikh problem and that of the Tamilians fighting for their rights in Sri Lanka.

Call for Political Solution

He wanted both State and Central Governments to desist from police action and advised them to seek a political solution of the problem. Mr. Patnayak also condemned the government-controlled media for painting a black picture of the Sikhs throughout the country. He advised the intelligentsia to hold similar conventions in different parts of the country to make non-Punjabis aware of the real issues involved in the Punjab problem.

Representatives of the Revolutionary Communist Party of India, Punjab Students Union, the Indian Democratic Peoples' Front, the Indian Peoples Front, People's Union for Civil Liberties, Punjab Kalyan Forum, United Akali Dal, Punjab Khetibari Zimidar Union, Janata Party the Sikh Lawyers Council participated in the convention. The convention condemned all innocent killings and appealed to the people to raise their voice against terrorism of all shades. It also condemned the Bihar Government for letting loose a reign of terror to curb the democratic struggle of the Mazdoor Kisan Sangram Samiti and demanded a judicial enquiry into the Arwal killings. It expressed solidarity with the Bihar peasantry and the labour class and supported their just struggle against the feudal elements and the State Government.

The committee which organised the convention decided to hold such conventions in all the districts of the State to mobilise public opinion against State terrorism. It also decided to set up fact-finding teams to enquire into all incidents of alleged police encounters.

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THE LAST SALUTE

Saadat Hasan Manto
Translation: Avtar Singh Judge

The Kashmir war had done something strange to Subedar Rab Nawaz. It had turned his head into something like a gun with its trigger out of order.

Rab Nawaz had seen action on many fronts in the Second World War. Wherever he fought he had proved his competence as a soldier and earned a reputation for fearlessness, courage and intelligence. It was thus natural that whenever his platoon commanders faced a difficult task, they would invariably choose him. And it was to his credit that he had never betrayed their trust.

But this war had robbed him of his old self assurance. A strange confusion had settled over his mind. Though, like a good soldier, he was as determined as ever to annihilate the enemy, he lacked his usual gusto and conviction. The reason was not far to seek. In every encounter his attention was arrested by familiar faces amongst his adversaries. Some of them had once been his close friends. These were the very people with whom he had fought shoulder to shoulder against the Axis powers.

Were the same people now his enemies?

Was it all a dream? The Subedar often wondered.

The proclamation of Second World War followed by frenzied recruitment of jawans; the measurement of chest and height; physical training and mock

manoeuvres; the rolling from one front to another; the end of war; and then the birth of Pakistan, followed by this war!

What a spate of events! Sometimes, Subedar Rab Nawaz had a lurking suspicion that some interested party was playing a mysterious game with the sole aim of confusing simple people. Otherwise, such momentous changes in such quick succession, seemed to him less than possible.

It was however, beyond doubt that they were now fighting over Kashmir. The provocation for it was no less clear to him. Pakistan coveted the territory and felt that it was indispensable for its continued existence.

But, the sight of those well remembered faces threw him into terrible confusion. Thus it was that the reason for which he had grabbed the gun would momentarily elude him. This was perhaps, the result of his persistent efforts to hammer into his head that now they were not fighting for a mess of pottage, lands or medals but for their country.

But, surely, this country had been his even before, though recently it had assumed a new name.

The Subedar, somehow, had a strong feeling that he was actually fighting against his own countrymen — his next door neighbours of yesterday, with whom he had family relations going back to several generations.

His new neighbour had come over to a country with which he had no associations whatsoever; where he had not laid a single brick to raise a home. On the contrary, this was the country where Rab Nawaz had spent all his life; and now he and his new neighbour, with guns on their shoulders had come out to fight for the same country.

Rab Nawaz was equally familiar with the situation of Muslim soldiers who had migrated from India. They had left behind their hearths and homes only to be fleeced of everything they could call their own. And for all this sacrifice what was their reward? Guns ... and those too, exactly like the ones they had left behind! Only the other day had been comrades-in arms, the Muslim and the Hindu against a common enemy. And what had been but one organisation then was now divided into two: A separate Indian army and a separate Pakistani Army!

It was this anomaly that accounted for the confusion in the Subedar's mind and paralysed his thinking. Were Pakistani soldiers fighting for Kashmir or only for the Muslims of Kashmir? If they were fighting for Muslims, why didn't they do so in other places as well? Moreover, if this was an Islamic war, as some claimed, then why had other Islamic countries not joined the war on Pakistan's side?

After prolonged deliberation, Rab Nawaz reached the conclu-

sion that it was not for a soldier to brood over such trifling details; to be thick skinned was a desirable quality in a good soldier.

Lately a battle had been in progress on the road connecting Muzaffarabad and Kairon, which runs along the river Kishen Ganga. *It was an old type of battle. For, at night, the valley would often ring not with gunfire but with mouthfuls of dirty abuse.*

Once, while the Subedar was getting his platoon ready for an evening patrol, a volley of abuse greeted them. The suddenness with which the offensive words had been hurled at them from below, unnerved the Subedar momentarily. The echoing words almost sounded ghoulis, as if phantoms were dancing and howling at them in a mad orgy.

"Damn it, what the hell is all this?" he blurted out.

One of his jawans hurled a fitting reply at the booming voices coming from below; then turned to Rab Nawaz and said, Subedar Sahib, the bastards are abusing us!"

The Subedar's first reaction was to mount a fierce attack on the enemy picket which was responsible for such obnoxious behaviour. But he restrained himself as it would have been a strategic blunder. So, not knowing what to do, he remained completely inert.

For his jawans the situation was intolerable. They soon lost their patience and started reta-

liating, in kind, with their voices at full pitch. The Subedar's first reaction was to stop them, but the kind of abuse coming up was such that he let them go on.

The enemy soldiers who were indulging in this highly provocative past time were, however, beyond their vision. In the day as well as at night their hiding places could not be detected; only their filthy words would rise from the foot of the hill, linger on in the vale and then die away in the thin air.

The Subedar's frustration was increasing with every passing moment. In this state of mind he could not help thinking that his jawans' retaliatory abuse would be quite useless as it would soar upwards instead of going down to the enemy.

Rab Nawaz also knew that mounting an attack on the enemy position would be a risky venture. But, he did something which was against his better judgement. He ordered his men to attack!

The jawans responded to their leader's call with zest, their hearts burning with vengeance.

The attack was successful. Only two of his men were killed and four wounded. The enemy lost three men and retreated, leaving some provisions behind. But, the Subedar and his jawans were terribly annoyed as they had not been able to capture a single enemy soldier alive. Their desire to punish the bastards

Continued on page 13, col 1

Continued from page 12, col 5

for their filthy utterances remained unfulfilled. The victory, however, gave them control of a strategically located hill. Rab sent a wireless message to his platoon commander, Major Aslam, to inform him of the encounter and received a word of cheer in reply.

It was a pretty hill with a fresh water spring at its crest. There were springs on almost every hill top in that area, but this was, perhaps, the biggest. They had an irresistible temptation to freshen up with a dip, even though it was pretty cold. They removed their clothes and with their teeth chattering, plunged in to the water and started splashing around. While they were still enjoying their bath, they heard a burst of gunfire. Naked, they crawled out of the pool.

The Subedar explored the low lying hill with his field glasses but was unable to spot the enemy. He was still scanning the area when he heard another burst of gunfire. Far away he could see the smoke rising from the bushy beard of a hillock. He ordered his jawans to fire at it. Instantaneously the valley became alive with the sound of gunfire from both sides. The Subedar carefully scrutinised the enemy position. It seemed they were safely lodged behind a small stone wall. The slightest movement on their part would have exposed them to the enemy's fire.

After a few more rounds of firing, the Subedar ordered his men not to waste any more ammunition. "Be on the look out!" he said. "The moment anybody tries to leave that wall, blow him out!" Instructions over, he happened to notice his stark-naked body. "Tail of a mule!" he said. "Without clothes, a man resembles an animal!"

Both sides continued to exchange fire intermittently. The game went on for two full days. The weather then turned extremely cold and the Subedar began ordering more and more rounds of tea instead of more rounds of firing. We told his men to keep the kettle constantly on the boil. But, watch on the enemy was not relaxed at the expense of the beverage.



The next day was extraordinarily chilly. The cold wind sent shudders through the body. Suddenly the man on the watch informed the Subedar of some commotion behind the stone wall. Rab Nawaz put his field glasses on and, as he was trying to scan the spot, a voice rose raucously, breaking the silence of the skies. The echo of some indistinct words kept reverberating in the air. Almost instinctively the Subedar pulled the trigger. As the sound of the shot faded out, the voice went up again.

It was obviously addressed to the Subedar. "Tail of a mule!"

Rab Nawaz shouted ... "Speak up you bastard! ... what do you say?"

The words of the Subedar obviously found their target as there was an immediate response. "Don't swear brother! the voice appealed.

Surprised and embarrassed, the Subedar looked at his jawans. An then cupping his palm to his mouth, shouted, "Brother! ... Your mother might have produced a brother On this side all are her paramours."

The voice on the other side sent forth a wounded admonition: "**Rab Nawaz!**"

A current ran through the Subedar's spine. The voice kept beating back and forth against the surrounding rocks, echoing and re-echoing his name until it was carried away by the chilly breeze, nobody knows where. It took Rab Nawaz some time to recover. "Who called me?" he shouted, and then out of sheer habit he swore, "Tail of a mule!"

Rab Nawaz was aware of the fact that the majority of the enemy soldiers fighting on the Titowal front belonged to the 6/9th Regiment. He knew many of them personally. Some of them were his dearest friends. And there were some with grouses too! But who was this man whom his words had hurt so grievously?

Rab Nawaz peered through his field glasses carefully. There was nothing to be seen against the swaying trees on the hillock. Cupping his palms to his mouth he shouted again, "Come on! Speak up! Who are you? He was still halfway through his query when like a revelation, a name came to his mind. Ram Singha ... Oi Ram Singha ... You tail of a mule!"

The hills were still echoing with 'tail of a mule' when Ram Singha's voice soared up: "You potter's donkey!"

Rab Nawaz felt a little peevish, and casting a look at his jawans, he mumbled, "talks nonsense ... this tail of a mule". And then as if he suddenly remembered something he had to tell Ram Singha immediately, he shouted, "Oi Baba Attal ke karrah parsad (Oh, you the sweet offerings at the holy temple of Baba Attal)!"

Ram Singha broke into peals of laughter and Rab Nawaz also joined him in the act. The echoes of their mingled laughter, flew back at them from the hillsides.

A strange hush fell on the Subedar's jawans.

When the sound of their laughter subsided, Ram Singha's voice came up from the other end: "Look here, chum, we want to have a cup of tea."

"Go ahead, enjoy yourself", Rab Nawaz responded.

"How can we go ahead, man; all the tea things are over there — on the wrong side?"

"Which side?"

"The side where you can blow us out."

"Rab Nawaz laughed. "Then what do you want?"

"Allow us to fetch the stuff."

The Subedar looked at his jawans and said, "Go ahead, fetch it?"

"I am sure you will shoot us then, you potter's donkey."

"Shut up, you tortoise of the holy tank."

"Promise, you won't fire" Ram Singha asked. He was laughing.

"In whose name?"

"Just promise."

"Go man, and take your stuff!" Rab Nawaz also laughed.

There was complete silence for some time. The jawan who held the field glasses cast a meaningful look at Rab Nawaz and was about to press the trigger when the Subedar stopped him saying:

"No, don't do that!"



He took over the glasses. A man crept out of the stone wall on all fours. After moving a little distance he stood up and disappeared into the bushes. When he re-emerged he was holding things in both hands. He stopped for a moment and then hurriedly dashed towards the stone wall.

As he disappeared, Rab Nawaz fired a shot and had a hearty laugh. The two sounds kept ringing in the valley for some time and when the silence returned a voice came from the other side: "Thank you!"

"Oh, don't mention it", shouted Rab Nawaz. Then turning to his jawans he said, "Let's have a round of firing."

Both sides now exchanged fire, for sheer fun. When quiet was restored, the Subedar again looked through his field glasses. Smoke was curling up from where Ram Singha's platoon was stationed.

"Have you prepared tea O' Ram Singha ...", the Subedar shouted.

Quick came the reply: "Not yet, you potter's donkey."

Rab Nawaz was a potter by caste. He was irked and touched to the quick if anybody ever mentioned that. Ram Singha alone had enjoyed this exclusive privilege, for they had been bosom friends. They were born and brought up in the same village, and were about the same age. Their fathers and grandfathers had also been friends. They had been to the same village school, had been enlisted together and fought many a battle as comrades-in-arms in the Second World War.

Feeling that he had been snubbed in front of his Jawans Rab Nawaz grumbled: "Tail of a mule, even now he doesn't stop it." Then, to show his resentment he shouted at Ram Singha, "Shut up, you louse of a donkey." His angry words were greeted with laughter. Not knowing what to do, Rab Nawaz started fiddling with the gun lying beside him in position. On an impulse he pulled the trigger. Together with the sound of the shot came a scream which pierced the sky. Rab Nawaz took a look through his field glasses. No! It couldn't be — but it was. Ram Singha staggered forward a few paces from the stone wall and collapsed.

"**Raaaam, Siiiiing!**" Rab Nawaz screamed jumping to his feet.

Instantaneously guns blazed forth from both sides. A bullet whizzed past Rab Nawaz, licking his right arm. In the confusion the Indian soldiers tried to

escape from the stone wall. Ineffective firing from the Fokistani side made it comparatively easy for them to do so. In a fit of frenzy the Subedar ordered his men to descend on the enemy.

He lost three of his men in the skirmish. The others reached their target after an immense struggle.

They found Ram Singha fallen on the hard rocky ground, lying in a pool of blood and groaning with pain. The bullet had got him in the stomach.

Ram Singha's eyes brightened as he noticed Rab Nawaz sitting close to him. A smile spread on his lips as he said, "What have you done, you potter's donkey?"

Vicariously, the Subedar felt the pain in his own body. He bent on his knees and started undoing Ram Singha's belt. "Tail of a mule, why the hell did you come out!" he wailed pathetically.

Ram Singha groaned with pain as his belt was being removed; Rab Nawaz examined his wound. It was pretty serious.

Pressing his hand against his wound Ram Singha said, "I was coming out to show myself ... and you ... you fired!"

Rab Nawaz felt a choking sensation in his throat. "I swear by the God Almighty ... I honestly do! ... I pulled the trigger without even the slightest intention to do so ... How could I know the offering of a donkey was coming out?"



By now Ram Singha had lost a lot of blood. His being alive in this condition was nothing short of miracle. Rab Nawaz did not think it fit to remove him elsewhere. He despatched a wireless message requesting the platoon commander to send a doctor immediately. He informed him that his friend Ram Singha had been seriously wounded.

It was already too late for a doctor to be of any help, Ram Singha's life was fast ebbing away. The message had been sent purely for the Subedar's own satisfaction. He tried to cheer up Ram Singha with words that refused to come out of his throat. "Don't worry my friend, the doctor will soon be here."

Ram Singha's voice was feeble when he spoke. "Forget it", he said, "But do tell me how many of my jawans have been killed by your men."

"Only one" answered Rab Nawaz.

"How many have you lost?" Ram Singha's voice was feebler.

Rab Nawaz lied. "Six", he said, and threw a sidelong glance at his jawans.

"Six ... hmmm ... six," Ram Singha seemed to be mentally counting, one by one. "You know, my men were demoralised after I was wounded ... But I encouraged them ... Buck up boys ... stake your all and go for the enemy ... six ... not bad!"

A sudden transformation took place in Ram Singha. His memory slipped back into the foggy past. He started recollecting long forgotten incidents about the time when he and Rab Nawaz were together. "Do you remember those days, Rab Nawaz?" he suddenly asked.

... The pranks at school; the tales of the 6/9th Regiment; the jokes about their commanding officers; their amorous affairs with strange women across the seas ...

Remembering something special, Ram Singha's face lit up with a broad smile. He started laughing. Though it revived the pain in his wound, he talked on. "You dirty pig, do you remember the madam?" he asked.

"Which madam?" enquired Rab Nawaz.

"The one in Italy ... I forget what name we gave her ... she was a fantastic woman!"

The image of the woman flashed past the Subedar's mind. "Yes, yes, that was madam Kanita Fanito!" He recollected the way she used to say 'No money, no fun', and then voicing an old grouse he said, "But the madam always favoured you!"

Ram Singha exploded into laughter. A lump of frozen blood blew out of his wound. The temporary bandage the Subedar had tied over it had slipped. He adjusted it back and told Ram Singha to be quiet.

It was of little use though. Ram Singha was now burning with fever. His mind was racing through the past at great speed. Even when his strength had practically oozed out, he kept talking intermittently.

"Do you people really want Kashmir?"

"Yes, Ram Singha," Rab Nawaz replied earnestly.

Ram Singha tossed his head and said, "No, no I can't believe it, you must have been tutored to say so."

"No, it is the other way round!" Rab Nawaz swore in order to convince him.

Ram Singha caught hold of Rab Nawaz's hand and said, "there is no need to swear my friend. The way he said it showed that he was far from convinced."

A little before dusk, Aslam, the platoon commander, arrived there accompanied by a few jawans. There was no doctor with him. Ram Singha kept mumbling deliriously. His voice was feeble and broken and it was difficult to make out anything. Major Aslam had also been in the 6/9th Regiment and knew Ram Singha. After listening to all that had happened, he turned to Ram Singha and spoke his name aloud.

Ram Singha opened his eyes. He seemed to recognise him. Suddenly wounded body straightened into the attention posture and his hand rose mechanically in salute. He was still lying in that posture when he reopened his eyes and gazed intently at Major Aslam's face.

The hand that was raised in salute then fell down like a log.

Visibly embarrassed, Ram Singha grumbled: "You are duped ... you are duped, dirty pig ... This is war ... This is war ..."

Halfway through the sentence he threw a questioning glance at Rab Nawaz and breathed his last.



Wastelands to Paddy Fields

Gazette News Service

For 93 farmers in Alisabad and Sikandarpur villages of Tanyawan Block in Hardoi district of Uttar Pradesh, the past few months have revolutionised their way of thinking. Hope has replaced despairing acceptance. Working together with the Sarvodaya Ashram, whose workers have been known to them for ten years, and with the Society for Promotion of Wastelands Development (SPWD), they have seen their land, barren and unproductive for years — 'usar' land — become green with paddy, offering them a future in which they might be able to produce enough food for their households, more fodder for their cattle and fuel for their needs.

Wastelands in the entire country, affected by alkalinity and salinity, are estimated at 7.16 million hectares, with ironically, the fertile Indo-Gangetic Plain the worst affected. Uttar Pradesh alone has 1.29 million hectares of this 'usar land.' What is most alarming is that such wastelands are increasing rapidly and satellite reports indicate that they have doubled over the past 10 years. The only way to attack this critical problem is to mobilise the farmers, and this can only be done if they actually see results in the field.

Initial Field Survey

The SPWD selected Hardoi district with approximately 35,000 hectares of 'usar' land as a pilot project, because it is a typically backward area with widespread poverty, and because the Sarvodaya Ashram has been working in the field there for a long period and has won the confidence of the farmers. The original idea of the SPWD was to grow only fodder and fuel crops on the 'usar'. But field surveys carried out by them to determine the villagers' own views on their priorities, revealed that the farmers' first priority was food. 71 per cent of the marginal farmers interviewed told the project workers that they did not grow enough food grains for their own needs. Fodder shortage was a major problem according to 82 per cent of the women interviewed, and the same percentage of farmers

pointed out that while fuel trees were their choice, seedlings were not available.

The surveyors found the villagers apathetic about the project. Past experience had shown them that they could expect little from government development programmes. Many of them said frankly that development programmes benefited only the bigger and better off farmers because they were the first to seize every opportunity. Another important factor was that poor farmers had lower health status, which contributed to their apathy.

Why Programmes Fail

Past programmes had not delivered the goods for a variety of reasons. For one, a wide gap usually exists between policy and implementation, because the realities at ground level are ignored by policy makers. Loan facilities for pumping sets were one example cited by farmers. Because their marginal income does not leave them surplus to pay off even the 12 per cent interest, let alone the principal, marginal farmers cannot take advantage of the scheme. Secondly, because government officials lay more stress on the targets they must fulfil, rather than on persons who are most in need, fertilisers and seeds reach the rich farmers, not the poor and marginal farmers, for whom the subsidised prices are actually intended. Family planning targets are often met by bargaining for gun licenses, and so on.

Another inhibiting factor is that the complex forms and systems for application for subsidies, loans or other facilities are just too complicated for the illiterate villagers. Field officials are thus able to take advantage of the situation, and indulge in malpractices. In addition field officials generally tend to live in district towns because basic amenities, such as electricity and running water, do not exist at the village level. Consequently very little communication or contact exists between villagers and field officials. By the time such officials appear in a village, on their very occasional visits, the farmer has already left for his fields.

The Project Begins

SPWD's overall plan was to develop 103 hectares in 9 villages for fuel, fodder and crops over a period of three years with the first phase covering Alisabad and Sikandarpur. The 'usar' land was to be cultivated with paddy, — this was 19.32 hectares of the villagers' own land — and the gram Samaj 'usar' land allotted to the project by the panchayats was to be planted with fuel trees (8.72 hectares) and fodder grass (4.10 hectares). The first step was demarcation and determination of local ownership of the land. So, survey and soil analysis of individual plots was carried out through the All India Soil and Land Use Survey (AISLUS), and by the Regional Agricultural Research Station in Hardoi. Twenty farmers were trained at the Central Soil Salinity Research Institute, so that right from the start of the project there was transfer of technology from the base up. The representative from SPWD soon found that living on the spot was essential if anything was to be done, and that living under the same conditions as villagers in the Sarvodaya Ashram Style was the only alternative! This turned out to be a major plus factor because it earned the confidence of the villagers and persuaded them to cooperate in the project.

For a project like this to succeed the farmers had to work on their own land. This sounds easy, but in reality most small and marginal farmers in the area are dependent on daily wages to survive and find it difficult, even impossible, to work on their own plots, even when the necessary inputs are provided. So project workers had to work out practical arrangements with individual farmers, for preparing the land for crops. This was done by helping them get work nearer their homes so they could work on the land in 'spare' time. Family efforts were encouraged and, as a last resort, loans were extended against the expected paddy harvest so that farmers could employ labour to help them when necessary. Even then, at the beginning, the farmers were reluctant to work, and skeptical. Only when the

time came for paddy transplanting, and they actually saw the healthy seedlings, did the entire family join in, spontaneously.

Preparations for the fuel and fodder crops required digging of pits for trees, and bunding and levelling for fodder. New problems arose. Field officials working according to tehsil maps did not take into account traditional usage of land, such as threshing grounds, burial grounds, etc. There could have been potentially explosive confrontations between these officials and angry villagers, with the latter being alienated from the project. But fortunately the Sarvodaya workers, understanding the villagers' needs, were able to select alternative sites with the consensus of the villagers.

The Cooperative Spirit

Persuasion and persistence

were also required to talk the farmers into surrendering a small portion of their precious lands to build an irrigation system of field channels, to carry water from the government tubewells and pumping sets put up in selected areas. The cooperative spirit slowly came alive with the joint working on the channels, a source of major encouragement to the project workers. But again problems arose, when the paddy nurseries came up. These were intended for the villagers participating in the projects, but the non-project villagers began to intrude and cut the seedlings for fodder.

Before transplanting seedlings, the 'usar' soil had to be treated with fertilisers and gypsum. To procure the gypsum in time became a major crisis, overcome only by the determination and initiative of the project workers. The arrival of 30 trucks carrying bags of gypsum had a tremendous effect on the farmers. Immediately the project assumed credibility in their eyes. They reacted enthusiastically and gladly accompanied the tractors carrying the gypsum to their individual plots. They themselves scattered the gypsum in the fields with neighbours helping one another when necessary.

After transplanting, the attitude of the farmers was totally transformed. They now saw the paddy growing in their own fields and took the initiative in approaching the project workers for help in protecting their crops from the pests which had attacked some fields. The government Plant Protection Officer was called in and advised on treatment. Spraying of insecticide was done by the farmers themselves and they cooperated with each other in this operation.

A New Spirit In Officialdom

Project workers noted another transformation of attitudes — in the field officers. Gradually, as these officers saw the dedication and sincerity with which the project workers carried on, and how the villagers responded, the officers also began to take interest, became involved in the project's progress and visited

the villages much more frequently. The Project Advisory Committee formed for guidance and field support at the start of the project, which provided a platform for discussions, review of progress, and allowed for prompt decisions to be taken, played a crucial role in obtaining the support of these officials.

Monthly reviews by the Collector spurred them into action as progress on their work was monitored. All this helped to create a healthy relationship between village project workers and government, invaluable in such work.

Lessons From The Project

SPWD and Ashram members drew many lessons from their experience in this pilot project. They realised that the great advantage they had gained was to have involved the villagers in the initial decision on *what* to plant, instead of imposing a programme on them. The planting of crops on their own land was very important to the villagers. This feeling of total participation grew gradually, overcoming the age old apathy, suspicion and skepticism. Villagers themselves suggested building a grazing enclosure for their cattle to keep them out of the fields, and persuaded others to agree. This was a major improvement as cattle are normally left to graze on grass, saplings or any unprotected vegetation. Grazing enclosures which require stall feeding are a totally new concept in U.P.

Seeing the hard work put in by others for their benefit impressed the farmers and created strong bonds of trust. It also inspired cooperation and set an example for them all to work together on building field channels, crop protection and other jobs. The setting of a villagers' committee to administer their fuel and fodder programme was another important, positive step, and women were brought into the mainstream of the project when the villagers agreed to the project workers' suggestion that 50 per cent of the committee members should be women.

The first phase of the project will be over by April 1987 when the crop cycle planned is complete and the wheat harvest is ready. The second phase, overlapping the first, starts in November this year with the extension of the project to 50 hectares of 'usar' land in neighbouring villages.

With the first phase completed, the SPWD field representatives will gradually withdraw, leaving increasing responsibility on the Voluntary Agency. Hopefully, as 'usar' soils are restored to normalcy and their cultivation becomes a regular agricultural operation, the Voluntary Agency will fade out, leaving the villagers to manage their own land independently, making use of the various schemes available.

Financial and planning controls in the pilot project have ensured low overheads and operation costs, which are essential if the project is to be replicated, which it must be many, many times over and this will be a major challenge to all those working. The project has only just got off the ground. But the first beginnings give good reason for hope that Alisabad and Sikandarpur can show the way.

Voluntary Movement at the Crossroads

Continued from page 16, col 1

plaints against voluntary agencies on its own initiative. And certainly the initial impression given, through some of Roy's own writings and views, was that this was practically a *fait accompli*, a kind of coup inflicted on voluntary organisations, on behalf of the government. Obviously, as many people now agree, the method of presentation of the idea was unfortunate and angered even those who feel the need for some sort of a forum for the voluntary sector.

Government's Bonafides or Malafides?

When a prominent volunteer rural development worker, like Bunker Roy was appointed Consultant to the Planning Commission in his field, many involved persons welcomed the move as indicating that the government had, belatedly, recognised the importance and potential of such voluntary work in the development field. When the 7th Plan, with its section on rural development, earmarked 200 crores for rural development projects to be channelled through voluntary agencies and the Prime Minister consistently emphasised the importance of such organisations and his in-

tention of involving them in many fields of activity, there was a certain gratification in the voluntary sector. There was hope that a new era of cooperation with government was around the corner.

However, the proposed Bill and Code have generated suspicion in many quarters and given a different complexion to the government's actions. The important achievements of the rural voluntary sector, both in actual work and in bringing critical development issues to public and government notice, plus its contribution to the growing consciousness of the rural and urban poor of their rights in Indian society — have made the voluntary sector some kind of a third force. In some areas this has already posed a challenge to established authority. In others it is a potential challenge. Is this why the government wants to control the sector in some way? Is the 7th Plan criteria for defining voluntary agencies eligible for government funds a first step in this direction? The definition differentiates rural agencies from urban and other organisations. The question

arises — "Is poverty exclusively rural?" Why should the voluntary sector be split along these lines?

By funding only rural agencies does the government not put all the others at a major disadvantage? Isn't their work of equal importance? In this context the proposal for the Council and Code of Conduct, again restricted to rural work organisations, divides the sector further. These are issues which will have to be thrashed out in the opening debate.

Why Depoliticise the Voluntary Sector?

Another disturbing feature of the draft proposals is the attempt in the Code of Conduct to depoliticise the role voluntary organisations. Bunker Roy and others have explained that this recommendation is aimed at stopping political exploitation of volunteer efforts. However, many social action groups, particularly small ones at the grass-roots level, follow specific political ideologies and yet are doing valuable work in helping the least privileged. Many scheduled castes and tribals, after a long, bitter battle, have been elected to panchayat or other local offices. Must such people be disallowed from working through deprivation of funds? Or through stigmatisation? Should they not be allowed to combine constructive politics with social welfare and/or social activism?

Raising yet another relevant point, Bharat Bhushan writing on "Depoliticising NGOs" in the *Times of India* (15.7.86) argues that when the proposed code lays down that the volunteer workers "modes of intervention must be constitutional and non-violent", the opportunity to interpret 'violence' invites real danger. If the voluntary organisation working for the rural poor challenges the local power structure, including the police, it can face all kinds of trumped-up charges. This is a repeated reality faced constantly by activists. Bhushan also points out that involving non-governmental organisations in anti-poverty programmes can create its own problems for government. The only way for authority to meet this challenge would be a code of conduct. So the circle is complete and if such a code goes through, the channelising of funds becomes a constraint on the receiving agencies.

Already such constraints exist, through government funding channelled through PADI/CART, exercised through selection of agencies for funding. In addition, the 200 crores earmarked in the 7th Plan are to be authorised only for projects within certain specified programmes. These are the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme, Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas, Integrated Rural Development Programme, Accelerated Water Supply Programme and so on. The constraints are inbuilt.

Debate Continues: Conclusions Emerge

As the debate continues, certain conclusions emerge. A large

number of voluntary organisations agree that some sort of forum in which the multitudinous agencies can meet and act as a lobby to fight for their common interests, some sort of a code of ethics to control those who are guilty of sins of omission and commission which basically undermine the voluntary movement, are essential. But these must come from the organisations themselves, with no suspicion of government involvement. Large and small agencies must have an equal voice.

With the larger amount of funds available, with the proliferation of agencies following this development, some sort of self-discipline is essential but, it, like the voluntary sector, must

be voluntary in all respects. Some persons, familiar with the complexities of the working of this sector, where the many organisations can be a veritable Tower of Babel, speaking with different voices, have suggested that, instead of a statutory body. There should be, every two years, a national convention of all voluntary agencies, to allow for a frank and free interchange of views, problems, grievances, between each other and with the authorities. The government must recognise the authority of such a convention and deal with the agencies accordingly.

One thing emerges from the present state of the debate: the time for decision is not yet.

PADI + CART = CAPART A Government of India Rope-trick

PADI, People Action for Development in India, grew out of the Freedom from Hunger campaign launched by FAO in the early 1960s.

Later this became PADI. While Freedom from Hunger was a channel only for FAO funds, PADI disbursed other funds, mostly at the government level, to agencies. It is a quasi-government body with officials heading it, and included selected consultants from voluntary bodies.

CART, Centre for Agricultural and Rural Technology, also a quasi-government organisation, came into existence because the government felt there was a need to reach technology to the people. There was a realisation that while science and technology research was going on and technology useful to the people, in the form of appropriate technology, was available, it was not reaching those who required it and could take advantage of it. There was no catalyst to transfer laboratory findings to the field. So CART was established in February 1984, as a coordinating body for funding projects and for disseminating information.

CAPART, Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology, has been formed by merging PADI and CART, for reasons of greater efficiency according to official sources. The explanation is that there was a certain overlapping of functions and activities. The President of CAPART is the Min-

ister for Rural Development, while the Director-General and Deputy Director General are both IAS officers. CAPART is registered under the Societies Act and is called an autonomous body, but it is under the Ministry of Rural Development, and is again a quasi-government organisation.

CAPART's General Body of 100 members has a mixed representation. 25 per cent are officers from different concerned Ministries (concerned with Rural Development in some way), from different government organisations such as the Planning Commission, and state rural development officials. Another 25 per cent are from research institutions, including private institutes like the Tata Energy Research Centre. 40 per cent are representatives of voluntary organisations, all registered working organisations, while the remaining 10 per cent are individuals of experience and standing. According to CAPART rules more than 50 per cent of the representation will be from voluntary organisations but given the breakdown explained above, the more than appears to be a mathematical impossibility. In any case, and this is the operative regulation, all the representatives on the 100 member General Body are nominated by the President including those from the voluntary sector. The Executive Council of 30 members is again nominated from the General Body by the President.

Communal Divide a Non-Starter in Ludhiana

The cultural function arranged by the Punjabi Sahit Sangeet Sabha of Ludhiana on September 6th 1986, gave the lie to the much publicised "communal divide" in the Punjab. The massive response from the Hindu and Sikh gathering of men and women was very different from the grim picture painted in daily newspapers about the situation in Punjab.

The audience reacted with whole-hearted applause to the melodious voices of Suman Dutta and Chaman Lal Chaman as they played out the scene from "Sohni Mahiwal". And one could not imagine the press accounts of Hindu-Sikh hostility when the audience shouted "encore" repeatedly and forced Mr Kuldeep Manak to sing song after song. The magical "tumbi" of Yamula Jatt held the entire audience spellbound and regaled them with its crisp dialogue. The songs he has composed himself, set to the well loved folk songs of Punjab, and sung in his rich, full throated voice, were enjoyed by everyone.

Singing "Damadam Masat Kalandar", Kuldeep Kaur was a

match for Runa Laila, while Shushma Gouri, with her golden voice, recalled Reshma. Even the police, who impose the unannounced curfew after 8.00 p.m. daily in the city, were present and enjoying the musical evening until 11.00 p.m.!

Inaugurating the function Jagdev Singh Jassowal struck a chord of truth when he said that these musical voices are capable of drowning out the terror of the terrorists' shots. This was a Punjabi evening in the true spirit of Panjabiat and the gathering of both communities expressed their desire to have many more such functions to overcome the traumas brought on by terrorism.

Renowned singer Sukhwant Kaur, Secretary of the Sahit Sangeet Sabha under the patronage of Jagdev Singh Jassowal, arranged the evening. The function honoured four top singers of Punjab, Kamla Jatt, Kuldeep Manak, Salim Iqbal and Sukhwant Kaur. Such evenings should be repeated all over the state to restore sanity and normalcy, to recall the Punjabi spirit, to restore communal harmony.

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Voluntary Movement at the Crossroads

Confusion, Suspicion over Government moves to Manipulate, Control

Harji Malik

Voluntary organisations are up in arms all over the country, over the proposal to establish a National Council of Rural Voluntary Agencies and State Councils, together with a "Code of Conduct/Ethics." Supporters of the proposal — Sanjit "Bunker" Roy, now Consultant to the Planning Commission on Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development, and Director of the Social Work and Research Centres, Tilonia, and some voluntary bodies — regard such measures as necessary "to strengthen the role of voluntary agencies in rural development", "to optimize the benefits of their activities", to help them in overcoming difficulties in implementing programmes and to protect them from harassment. They argue that voluntary agencies must conform to standards of conduct and rules of accountability; that a "watchdog body" is essential. In their view the proposals are in the interests of the voluntary agencies.

Those who hold the opposite view — given the evidence of opinions voiced in the press and in meetings of groups of voluntary bodies, this is the larger section of concerned opinion — see these proposals as the thin edge of the wedge of government control. They fear such control will ultimately end voluntarism and democratic social action. Their fears are based on past experience in the cooperative, panchayat raj and community development sectors. And, on their perception of the increasing tentacles of government control in all spheres, of the growing centralisation of power. This to them is another manifestation of the present regime's managerial approach to governance.

The Council — Whose Idea?

Suspicions have been aggravated by the unnecessary mys-



tery surrounding the genesis of the proposals for the National Council. It is generally believed that the proposals emanated from Bunker Roy, but government officials exhibit a certain coyness in the matter, asserting that it is not clear whose idea this is. They hasten to add, however, that if this is Roy's idea, then it is proposed by him as a member of the voluntary sector, *not* in his capacity as Consultant to the Planning Commission and to the Ministry of Rural Development. The question is whether it is possible to separate the two roles. And, if the proposals are for the benefit of the voluntary organisations, and not motivated by the government's desire to control, why should there be so much beating about the bush?

Relevant Facts

The relevant, important facts seem to be (1) Bunker Roy drafted the section in the 7th Five Year Plan on voluntary

groups, which contains the idea of a Code of Conduct for groups receiving government funds. (2) In January 1985, at a meeting held in Delhi's India International Centre, of a few voluntary organisations, together with government representatives and some intellectuals — Bunker Roy was present — the idea camp up of a national forum to enable voluntary organisations to get together and frame some sort of a code of conduct for themselves. (3) In March that year a committee of about 13 voluntary organisations, elected arbitrarily it appears, without consulting other organisations — it is not clear who did the selection — was set up to draft a proposal for establishing a National Council. PADI, People's Action for Development in India, a quasi-government organisation. Financed the infrastructure for the committee's activities and PADI's general secretary was a committee member. (4) The "Draft for Discussion", which includes the Draft Bill for presentation in Parliament, and the minutes of the five meetings held, was circulated to over a thousand voluntary organisations, but only in the English language. (5) The organisations were asked to reply to CART, Council for Advancement of Rural Technology, to PADI or to the Consultant to the Planning Commission. Correspondence carried on by Bunker Roy with voluntary organisations was on Planning Commission letterhead, not on the Tilonia letterhead. See Box — Mystery Funds "For Draft For Discussion".

Rejection by Some Committee Members

Since the distribution of the draft, some committee members have come out against the proposals. Subhash Mendhapurkar, Director SUTRA, pointed out in *Mainstream* (2.8.86) that the committee had only four members from small agencies working on low budgets at grassroots level. This was in reply to Bunker Roy's earlier *Mainstream* article (14.6.86), "Power Brokers in Voluntary Sector" in which he had lashed out at the large voluntary bodies, many receiving massive foreign

assistance, who he accused of rigidly controlling smaller agencies dependant on them. Mendhapurkar said that the other nine organisations represented on the committee were "either large government or foreign-sponsored groups working up to a national level", and that while certain "power brokers" had been omitted, their interests were fully represented. He went on, "Bunker continues to propagate the idea of creating a monolithic licensing institution in the form of a Council which would then enforce a Code of Conduct on voluntary agencies stifling innovativeness, and dampening their dedication through increased vulnerability to power brokers." He concludes that only a voluntary body, which voluntary organisations choose to support, and which can support them, can serve their interests. Many others echoed his views in various meetings, pointing out that uniformity and conformity can be the death of voluntary effort. Ms. Ela Bhat is one of these. Grass roots organisations should be allowed to grow, not be curbed by controls in her opinion. She sees the proposed bill as concentrating on regulating agencies, not on helping them to develop, or protecting them.

At a meeting called in Andhra by the Young India Project, where small 'action groups' met with central and state government representatives, CART, PADI and Consultant (June 30th, July 1st 1986), certain controversial issues were discussed and important points clarified.

Clarification by Government and the Consultant.

Smarajit Ray, Joint Secretary,

Ministry of Rural Development stated the government's position that drafting and promoting the Bill and Code of Conduct was a matter purely for the voluntary organisations, that if the majority of such groups opposed such a measure, the government would not consider enacting the Bill. He agreed with the position taken by many agencies that for the government, existing legislation was sufficient to enforce accountability where foreign and government funds were involved. Ashok Jaitly, Deputy Director General of CART, made it clear that PADI/CART now amalgamated as CAPART (Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology, (See Box) were funding groups and would continue to do so, irrespective of the fate of the proposed measures. Funds provided by them were public funds, and the document of understanding executed between PADI/CART and the concerned agency for every project, assured accountability.

Bunker Roy told the meeting, categorically, that the draft of the Bill and the Code had been circulated among voluntary organisations only to initiate a debate (1) whether such measures were required (2) if the consensus was 'yes', what form they should take. He felt strongly that lack of communication had led to misunderstanding and undue apprehension. A National Council had been proposed because some people, including himself, felt that only a government-created statutory body would have the authority to intervene on behalf of voluntary agencies which, in his view, were highly vulnerable to state interference. He pointed at the Kudal Commission as an example of such harassment. He agreed that a great deal more discussion and thinking was required on the entire matter. But he insisted that there was a need for introspection by voluntary agencies. He emphasised that his concept was *not* that of a Council as an overall, disciplinary, controlling, investigative body. He was prepared to accept an alternative structure which could effectively serve the purpose.

Contradictory Clarifications

Bunker Roy's clarifications on these points contradict many features of the draft which have aroused apprehension, for the Council as envisaged in the draft is a "watchdog" body and has powers to investigate com-

Continued on page 15, col 1

Voluntary Organisations in the 7th Plan

2.115 From the Planning Commission — 7th Five Year Plan.

"The criteria for identifying voluntary agencies for enlisting help in relation to the rural development programmes can be as follows:

(i) The organisation should be a legal entity.

(ii) It should be based in a rural area and be working there for a minimum of 3 years.

(iii) It should have broad-based objectives serving the social and economic needs of the community as a whole and mainly the weaker sections. It must not work for profit but on 'no profit and no loss basis'.

(iv) Its activities should be open to all citizens of India irrespective of religion, caste, creed, sex or race.

(v) It should have the necessary flexibility, professional competence and organisational skills to implement programmes.

(vi) Its office bearers should

not be elected members of any political party.

(vii) It declares that it will adopt constitutional and non-violent means for rural development purposes.

(viii) It is committed to secular and democratic concepts and methods of functioning."

2.123 There is need for voluntary agencies to decide on a code of conduct to be applicable to those agencies receiving government funds.

2.119 The need to establish a regular forum was felt during the 6th Plan period... It is hoped that during the Seventh Plan period such Consultative Groups will be established in all States and given operational responsibilities. It is proposed that at the Central level, voluntary effort in the rural development sector with its allied services is promoted on a much larger scale with greater responsibilities through PADI and such other bodies as may be established...

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